

Early exit from Big 12 could save CU money

Beebe acknowledges issues with Buffs staying two years

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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The University of Colorado could save itself approximately \$1.8 million by leaving the Big 12 Conference for the Pac-10 in 2011 instead of 2012, according to the formula governing such moves in the Big 12 bylaws.

CU has already provided two years notice of its intention to leave to the Big 12, meeting the requirement to do so in the conference's bylaws. Those rules mandate any departing member must forfeit 50 percent of its share of conference revenue for each of the final two years it is in the league.

Colorado has received around \$9 million in each of the past two years and would probably be in line for similar amounts over the next two years. Fifty percent of that would be withheld over a two-year period for a total of about \$9 million.

The Big 12 bylaws say that if a departing school gives one year notice, which would have to be done by July 1, it forfeits 80 percent of its revenue for that year and 90 percent if less than a year notice is given.

Assuming CU's conference distribution remains the same for the 2010-11 school year, the school would forfeit about \$7.2 million instead of the \$9 million it would lose over a two-year span.

Big 12 Conference commissioner Dan Beebe said CU has indicated in recent days it would prefer to move up its timetable by a year.

While many of the details remain in flux and might not be worked out for months, Beebe acknowledged he sees potential problems with a team competing in the league for two years knowing it is headed for another conference, and it might be best for all involved for CU to make the move sooner. "The honest feeling that I have is it is difficult to have two years of competition with an institution that is going to be leaving," Beebe said in an interview with an ESPN radio affiliate in Texas. "We'll see about accommodating their interest."

During a news conference at Folsom Field last week in which the Pac-10 welcomed Colorado to the league, Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said his league could add Colorado earlier than 2012 if it needed to do so. He said the ideal scenario would be for the Buffs to join in 2012 when the Pac-10's new television agreement will begin and all indications were Tuesday that the conference still prefers that timing.

The Pac-10 also has pledged to help CU finance the move most likely by replacing any money CU loses up front in conference distributions from the Big 12. CU would pay back that money by taking smaller distributions in the first few years it is in the Pac-10.

Nebraska announced last week it is moving the Big Ten Conference in 2011 and officials at the school questioned whether the school will have to pay the Big 12 anything to leave.

Beebe made it clear Tuesday during a teleconference with reporters that the conference bylaws require him to withhold money from schools that choose to leave the league.

Beebe also said five of the schools in the Big 12 that were at risk of being left behind -- Missouri, Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State and Baylor -- during talk of conference expansion and realignment have agreed to forfeit that share of exit fees from CU and Nebraska. Beebe said schools such as Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State would be in line to receive that extra money for keeping the Big 12 together.

It would be in those school's interest for CU and Nebraska to perform well in football and men's basketball this year because the vast majority of money from conference distributions comes from television and postseason appearances in those two sports.

Changing perspectives

Members of the Big Ten Conference have been complaining for years that the lack of a conference championship game in football hampers teams from that league in the national championship picture because the Big Ten season ends in mid-November and the league falls off the radar for some voters.

That problem was, at least to some degree, at the heart of the decision to add Nebraska and get to a total of 12 teams, the number required by the NCAA for a conference championship game in football.

Yet, now that the Big 12 has been reduced to 10 teams and is unlikely to have a championship game after both Nebraska and CU leave, league officials and officials from member schools are touting it as a good thing to be where the Big Ten once was.

Sure, Texas and Oklahoma won't face the possibility of being tripped up in a conference championship game any more, but that likely won't make them immune to some of the problems elite Big Ten teams have faced in the national championship hunt.

Can't we all just get along

Beebe said he is confident that the 10 remaining members of the Big 12 can build a strong future together and get over some of the hurt feelings created by the conference expansion and realignment storm that appears to have passed.

"I think any kind of exercise like this results in some bruises we're going to have to heal," Beebe said. "But I think there is also even a higher level of understanding of how much we need each other. My full anticipation as we move forward and heal the bruises is that we're going to have a level of commitment that hasn't been there in the past and a level of understanding of what each of these institutions means to the others."

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Woelk: CU's move still right after Texas strong-arm

Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Four months ago, when a Colorado move to the Pac-10 first became a serious possibility, I thought it was a great idea.

The only thing that's changed today is that I'm even more convinced that CU made the right decision. Anyone who sees what kind of strong-arm job Texas pulled on the rest of the Big 12 in order to keep the league intact has to agree.

The Pac-10 is an outstanding conference, full of schools with whom CU is a good match academically and athletically, and a culture that promotes many of the ideals that Colorado embraces.

Put integrity high on that list -- then ask yourself if the Big 12 can still count that quality as part of its conference fabric.

Will the move mean less potential revenue for the Buffs? Of course. A 16-team conference that included Texas and all of its little brothers would have no doubt been a bigger lure in television contract negotiations.

But the Buffs will still make more money in the Pac-10 than they made last year, and will almost certainly match -- or exceed -- what they would have made had they stayed in the Big 12. Meanwhile, they will not have to watch a couple of schools dictate the direction of an entire conference. They will not have to compromise their ideals just to stay afloat.

But let's all give Big 12 commish Dan Beebe a nice round of applause today. He salvaged a league that had been given up for dead just a few days ago (and savaged a handful of schools in the process).

To "save" the league, Beebe had to sell out the majority of the conference members and convince them to give Texas everything it wanted. The man in charge with looking out for the best interests of every school looked out for a select few -- and kept his job in the process.

Did the Big 12's "other schools" sell their souls? Of course they did -- but there was only one bidder, and with their survival on the line, they clearly believed that selling out their fans, their student athletes and their schools was better than the alternative.

Texas got everything it wanted from the new deal, then made sure Oklahoma and A&M were dealt the same hand.

For starters, those schools received assurances that they can proceed with plans to start their own television network, and a guarantee of an even larger slice of the conference revenue pie. Thus, they'll get more money from the conference television contract -- and then be in competition with that contract. The only losers in the deal are all the other schools in the conference.

Oh, but there's more. Much, much more.

The little schools also gave up roughly \$2 million apiece.

When -- actually, I should say if -- Colorado and Nebraska pay an exit penalty for leaving the Big 12, it will put roughly \$15 million to \$20 million in the conference kitty. But Kansas, Kansas State, Baylor, Iowa State and Missouri reportedly have agreed to give up their share of that money in order to fatten the pockets of the schools that were also threatening to leave.

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My guess is that Beebe will be in line for a nice little bonus for this plan -- and of course, KU, Kansas State, Baylor and Iowa State will probably have to pay it.

Actually, the other schools should be happy Texas didn't want more.

The Longhorns could have demanded that they get to play all of their games at home -- and the other schools would have conceded.

UT officials could have dictated that every conference championship -- in every sport -- will now be played in Austin. The rest of the schools would have praised UT's facilities and started making hotel reservations.

Shoot, the 'Horns could have demanded one fifth down every football game (Missouri gives 'em away already), no shot clock when they have the ball in basketball, and just a little head start in every track meet.

And Kansas, Kansas State and Co. would have said, "Thank you sir. May I have another?"

But let me make this very clear: I don't blame the Longhorns. What use is a big stick if you don't get to swing it once in a while? They just wanted their fair share (and maybe a little bit of everyone else's). They were looking out for their interests, and in the ever-escalating arms race that is college athletics, they can't be blamed.

But I also gained a little more respect for the Pac-10 on Monday. Commissioner Larry Scott made a strong statement that integrity will be a part of the conference's dealings -- and even though it comes at a monetary price, I like that kind of statement.

Apparently, the Pac-10's biggest mistake was taking the Longhorns at their word. For months, the Pac-10 had been courting Texas and the Longhorns gave every indication they were headed West. They said they'd agree to an equal split of conference revenue, and would forego plans for their own network.

But late Monday, a variety of reports said the Longhorns gained their concessions from the rest of the Big 12 -- then went back to the Pac-10 and said they'd need the same kind of deal to move West.

The Pac-10 politely said thanks, but no thanks. The league stuck to its guns. The promise of more money -- gasp -- was actually overruled by some principle and integrity.

Again, I don't blame Texas. Not a bit. DeLoss Dodds and Co. had to do what they believed best for their program and their university. I'm told that's the way business works these days -- and that's what college athletics is. A business.

But I will be curious to see how the other schools in the league react in the future when Texas decides it wants more ... of anything.

My guess is those other schools (You there Mizzou? Anyone home in Lawrence? Manhattan? Anyone with a backbone left north of Oklahoma?) will privately gripe and publicly agree.

And that's what life will be like in the "new" Big 12.

Be glad Colorado got out.

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Buffs eager to know entry date to Pac-10

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

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Colorado University WR, DaVaughn Thorton, right, celebrates with teammate, Toney Clemons, after Thorton caught a pass for a touchdown during CU's spring football game at Folsom Field on April 10, 2010. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

Colorado could make its Pac-10 entrance sooner than later now that the Big 12's survival is ensured with 10 schools who want to be together.

No decision has been reached, but Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said Tuesday: "We need (the entry date) to be resolved real soon. It's probably premature to project one way or another."

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If CU sticks around until 2012 while Nebraska joins the Big Ten in 2011, the Big 12 will have one season with an 11-school schedule. And still to be calculated is the actual buyout figure to leave the conference.

Ever since expansion was first discussed in February, CU officials made it clear they were aware of Big 12 bylaws requiring two years' notice of departure and an exit fee at least 50 percent and up to 80 percent of potential TV earnings.

Bohn and Pac-10 officials have said they have a plan in which the Pac-10 would help Colorado finance the Big 12 exit penalties. However, details have not been announced.

"Our bylaws require us to withhold revenues from any departing members, which we'll do and then distribute to those (remaining) members," Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe said Tuesday during a teleconference.

Beebe said the Big 12 will use the penalty fees to help appease Texas A&M, Texas and Oklahoma.

"It hasn't been completed yet," Beebe said, "but part of their thinking is we would hold out part of the distribution that would've gone to us from those member institutions (Colorado and Nebraska) and use that to help Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Texas hopefully stay in the conference and overcome the significant revenue projections that they were getting for going to

another conference or two."

Actual exit penalty fees will be determined after the television and NCAA Tournament revenues are calculated. Bohn has said the cost "could be" roughly \$9 million.

"You can look at their (Nebraska and CU) distribution this year and just multiply it by two and then take away 80 percent, you'd have a pretty good idea," Beebe said.

Bohn expressed absolutely no regrets with the move to the Pac-10 despite promises of doubled distribution money in the restructured Big 12. Actual Pac-10 distributions under a renegotiated contract remain to be seen. Any hypothetical figures last week were based on a 16-team conference and the lucrative Dallas TV market.

If anything is more clear since the announcement last week, Bohn believes the Pac-10 will want to stick with a nine-game league schedule. There are eight league and four nonconference games under the current Big 12 format.

CU already had nonleague dates lined up with Pac-10 members Cal, Oregon and Washington between this fall and 2015. There also is a series with Utah, which could be on the Pac-10's list. The Utes are required to give the Mountain West Conference just one year's notice, so Utah could compete in the Pac-10 by 2011.

CU associate athletic director Dave Plati, who shares scheduling responsibilities, said it is

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standard procedure to nullify all nonleague contracts if a school changes conferences. That also would absolve CU of paying a buyout to a nonleague opponent if a game is dropped to accommodate the new league schedule.

"It's not a matter of finding opponents," Plati said, "it's a matter of rearranging them."

While the Colorado State game will remain on the Buffs' schedule, Bohn did not see room to continue the Nebraska rivalry. Barring any changes, the final game of the storied series is Nov. 26 in Lincoln.

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Krieger: CU leaps into its ideal league at perfect time

By Dave Krieger
Denver Post Columnist

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Colorado and tailback Brian Lockridge, pictured during the team's spring game, have leapt into the Pac-10. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

The Big 12 will soon have 10 members. The Big Ten will soon have 12 members.

Which raises the philosophical question: Does an intercollegiate athletic conference have to know how to count?

And the related question: If they just trade names, will that make all this unseemly money-grubbing by our major universities go away?

Alas, probably not. Institutions of higher learning don't like to admit this, occupied as they are with the very serious business of educating the next generation, but in their spare time, they also

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operate de facto farm systems for the NFL and NBA as sort of a hobby.

In pursuit of the best players, they pay coaches as much as entire engineering departments and build weight rooms the size of what we used to call gymnasiums. Then they run around looking for the money to pay for it.

That will pretty much sum up the game of musical conferences playing out this week, with Colorado jumping from the Big 12 to the Pac-10, Nebraska leaping from the Big 12 to the Big Ten, and Texas flirting with the Pac-10 just long enough to get an even sweeter deal from the Big 12 than it had before.

Despite fielding pedestrian football and basketball teams that made Colorado seem like anything but a major catch, CU managed to achieve the best possible result. It's not only better than staying in the Big 12, it's also better than joining the gargantuan Pac-16 that was imagined when the week started.

If you measure these things purely by the TV money, the way Texas does, the Pac-16 was Colorado's most lucrative option. There would have been a conference TV network, and the dissolution of the Big 12 might have freed it of an estimated \$9 million in departure fees.

So, in some quarters, the decision by Texas and its cronies to stay in the Big 12 was seen as bad news for Colorado, costing it money. Now, there might not be a conference television network,

and CU may have to pay those Big 12 departure fees.

But long run, competitively, the alternatives were far worse for the Buffs. Had Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State followed them west, the Buffs would have, in effect, moved from the Big 12 North to the Big 12 South. The revenue from a Pac-16 might have been good, but the results on the football field would not have been.


Playing in a conference with Texas, which demands preferential financial treatment and gets it, is like pro baseball. There's no salary cap, the Yankees will dramatically outspend you, and that handicap will never go away.

Playing in an egalitarian conference like the Pac-10 is more like the NFL. Everybody gets the same distributions. No preferential treatment. You still have to compete with a national powerhouse in Southern Cal, but even there the Buffs' timing is fortuitous, with the Trojans now facing onerous NCAA sanctions.

Had CU remained in the Big 12, it would have been the same old story — a conference dominated by the Texas- Oklahoma axis in which the entire North Division played the role of the Washington Generals. Tom Osborne, running the best Big 12 North football program at Nebraska, recognized this and evacuated right after the Buffs did.

It is as if CU woke up one morning and realized

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it was adopted. It looked around at its siblings in the Big 12 North and noticed it didn't look anything like them.

No knock on small-town America, but if you were a ballplayer in a league consisting of Lawrence, Kan.; Manhattan, Kan.; Columbia, Mo.; Ames, Iowa; and Lincoln, Neb.; and you moved to a league consisting of two teams in Los Angeles and one each in Tempe, Ariz.; Tucson and Salt Lake City, you would probably figure you'd been called up to the big leagues.

From a recruiting and marketing point of view, that's what happened to the Buffs. They will gain regular exposure in bigger markets, not to mention better road trips for fans and alumni, which might improve how their teams travel.

If it's true the Buffs are likely to end up in a Pac-12 South with Southern Cal, UCLA, Arizona, Arizona State and Utah, it would vastly increase their profile in Los Angeles, an important recruiting market. And it would give them a better chance to be competitive than constantly knocking heads with the better-financed football factories of Texas and Oklahoma.

Obviously, the Buffs have to get their football and basketball programs in order before they can hope to compete in any major conference. But at least their deal with the Pac-10 gives them that chance.

CU is moving into a conference with markets more like its own and schools more like itself. In t

he short-lived chaos of musical conferences, it grabbed the right chair.

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Sweeping changes appear unlikely with expansion

Small alterations seem to be all for expansion

Associated Press
Boulder Daily Camera

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NEW YORK -- Now that the Big 12 has survived the storm, the massive upheaval that many in college athletics have been bracing for seems far less likely.

"I felt like there was either going to be very significant change or very little," Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "Now I feel like we're trending toward relatively small change for the moment."

A potentially huge change was averted Monday when Texas declined an invitation to the Pac-10. With the Longhorns committed to the Big 12, the rest of the league's remaining teams fell in line and decided that life without Colorado (heading to the Pac-10) and Nebraska (off to the Big Ten) would be fine -- and profitable.

Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe held a conference call with reporters Tuesday and provided some details about how he went about saving his league. He also said something that might give a hint to where college sports is -- or is not -- heading in the future.

"This process resulted in so many people in our business and our enterprise telling me that it would not be beneficial to what we do to have these mega-conferences," he said.

All this expansion angst started back in December when the Big Ten announced that it would explore the possibility and make a decision in 12-18 months.

Commissioner Jim Delany and the Big Ten's hierarchy seemed perfectly fine with taking their sweet time until Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott decided to raid the Big 12.

"What was surprising was the effort on the part of the Pac-10 to go to 16 teams," said Neal Pilson, president of the Pilson Communications media consulting firm and a former president of CBS Sports. "That was a tsunami that would have had serious consequences for college football. The domino effect of doing that would have impacted the ACC, the Big East as well as the Big 12."

Big East commissioner John Marinatto has to feel better than he did 48 hours ago, because if indeed there is another uprising in the works it could be his league fighting for survival.

With the Big 12 scrambling to decide which members were in and which were out, Nebraska said goodbye to that league and became the Big Ten's 12th member.

Delany has said the Big Ten might not stop at 12. But the league didn't swoop in to save Missouri from a Big 12 collapse. If Delany is thinking along the lines of Scott, he's going to have pry some teams from the Big East and maybe, finally, get Notre Dame to join the Big Ten.

While just a few days ago anything seemed possible -- Texas and Oklahoma in the Southeastern Conference! -- the Big East being sacrificed for the Big Ten's benefit does not seem likely.

"I applauded Dan Beebe for not giving up and trying to put something together, something that might have a major impact on the future if intercollegiate athletics," Western Athletic Conference commissioner Karl Benson said.

Benson is in the market for at least one team these days, with last week's departure of Boise State to the Mountain West Conference.

Benson said he expects to invite one or two schools to the WAC before the summer is out.

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