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Colorado in a California state of mind — and vice versa

William Porter
The Denver Post

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CU president Bruce Benson, left, passes a red rose to chancellor Phil DiStefano during a celebration at Folsom Field last week following the announcement that CU would be moving to the Pac-10 Conference,

whose champion football team plays in the Rose Bowl.
(Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

Between the influx of California transplants warbling "Rocky Mountain High" and Colorado's largest university abandoning the Big 12 athletic conference to embrace the Pac-10, a question arises: Has Colorado's collective gaze finally turned due west?

A number of people paid to ponder such matters say yes.

There has always been amused debate about whether Denver is the northernmost city of the Southwest or westernmost city of the Midwest.

Here's another way of thinking about it: Perhaps we have become the easternmost city of the Far West, thanks to an evolving relationship between Colorado and longtime rival California. Recent years have seen a heavy recruitment of Golden State businesses and cross-pollination of ideas and goals between the states.

"The largest contributor of population and business ideas is California," said Tom Clark, executive vice president of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. "We've all become very westward looking, and we're looking at one place on the horizon — California."

That's a marked change from the days when Coloradans looked askance at California, sort of the way a middle-class student at a state school viewed a rich Ivy Leaguer.

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"I think we went through a phase of resentment from the Rocky Mountain states toward California, largely because of water rights," said Patricia Limerick, a history professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder and director of the Center of the American West. "It's almost like we wanted an alien outsider to blame for everything. We have been limping along with a sense of inferiority for so long, and there's no need for that anymore."

Consider Colorado's place on a United States map, and you see that it occupies a unique position in the push-pull of surrounding influences.

Discounting the nominal borders we share with Arizona, Oklahoma and Nebraska, our neighbors break down like this: New Mexico, arguably the most Southwestern of all states; Kansas, a Midwestern archetype; Wyoming, with its Wild West bona fides; and Utah, which because of its Mormon heritage is almost an entity unto itself.

In the middle of all this is Colorado, an amalgam of Southwest, Midwest and Old West sensibilities.

Clark acknowledges the traditional rivalry with California and notes that historically it has been cyclical. When one state is up, the other tends to be down, and a significant chunk of residents come and go during these periods.

But like Limerick, Clark sees an emerging parity

between the two states, one that is engendering a more freewheeling exchange of ideas and goals.

"Familiarity breeds more than contempt," he said. "It also creates a commonality of vision and interests."

CU's jump from the Big 12 to the Pac-10 is merely the latest indicator of our deepening ties with the West Coast.

In 1980, 7.4 percent of Colorado's transplants were born in California, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In 1990, it was 7.8 percent. By 2000, the figure had jumped to 11.5 percent, or 243,071 people.

That means that almost one in eight transplants living in Colorado that year was born in California. The trend continues.

In 2005, 25,350 Californians moved to Colorado, far outstripping runners-up Texas and Florida. In 1990, Kansas and Illinois were in the top 10 of relocatees. They didn't crack the list in 2005.

"I moved here because I liked the Colorado lifestyle and it was just a better place to live than Los Angeles," said Andrew Simons, who moved to Denver from Southern California two years ago. "I'm a freelance tech writer, and I can do that just as easily here as L.A."

Change is also reflected in college enrollments. In 2009, Californians topped the list of out-of-

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stators attending CU, with 1,954 students. Illinois followed, with 597 students. And the largest pool of CU-Boulder graduates in the country lives in Southern California.

"I think part of it is a natural thing," said Gary Horvath, managing director of the business development division at CU's Leeds School of Business. "There's a strong high-tech presence in both states. Colorado has tried to recruit California companies because of those similarities."

Horvath sees benefits of the relationship in areas of advanced research, noting CU's relationship with the University of California, Berkeley.

"I think you'll especially see it in optics, nanotech and the cutting-edge technology that will move us forward," he said. "And I see that as being valuable."

Sports rivalries have also shifted. The Kansas City Chiefs-Denver Broncos game isn't quite as big as it once was, supplanted by rivalries with the Oakland Raiders and San Diego Chargers. Granted, some of that is due to shifting fortunes among teams and the personalities involved. Colorado baseball fans, too, measure the Rockies against the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Diego Padres and San Francisco Giants, their division rivals in the National League West.

Not that the changing relationship between Colorado and California is akin to the fall of the

Berlin Wall, spurring wild celebration and a mass group hug.

"The whole thing reminds me of the bumper stickers I used to see when I lived in Oregon: 'Don't Californicate,' " Horvath said with a laugh.

Still, Colorado business leaders like what they see.

"We've wound up with this cross-pollination, which economically is a good thing," Clark said. "It's always good to have new ideas in the petri dish."

Staff writer Burt Hubbard contributed to this report. William Porter: 303-954-1877 or wporter@denverpost.com

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New Big 12 a big bummer for some fans in Texas

Associated Press
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 06/18/2010 04:03:21 PM MDT

AUSTIN, Texas -- After all the congratulations and relief about rescuing the Big 12 and those sweeping promises of big payouts, fans at Texas and Texas A&M still can't help but feel disappointed.

Tantalized by the prospect of heading off to exotic new playgrounds in the Pac-10 and the football-crazy Southeastern Conference, Longhorns and Aggies fans are looking at more road trips through the wind-swept heartland of America.

At Texas, the decision to keep the status quo means the Longhorns are still the big dog in the Big 12, but they already were. Staying put in a Big 12 that will soon be without Nebraska and Colorado feels a bit hollow.

Aggies fans, meanwhile, have lit up Texas A&M online message boards and radio shows, angry that they purportedly missed a chance to join the most powerful football conference in the land in the SEC and get out from under Texas' considerable shadow.

"They felt like something was just ripped away from them," said Billy Liucci, owner and editor of the popular A&M fan site Texags.com, who happens to like A&M's position in the leaner Big 12. "It's the most emotionally charged reaction to anything around here since I don't know when."

A profane e-mail to Texas A&M athletic director Bill Byrne prompted him to respond with an angry voice mail.

"Someone who has the no guts to write something like that needs to have his (expletive) kicked," the 65-year-old Byrne said in the call, which was posted on Youtube.com. Byrne later issued a 1,700-word statement defending the Aggies' decision to stay in the Big 12 and apologized for the outburst.

"After reading over 200 similar e-mails the other night, I finally had one set me off and I called the writer. I'm a very competitive person and like many of you, I was raised not to back down when challenged. I've also got a bit of an Irish temper which came across in my voicemail. I regretted what I said as soon as I hung up. I should have been above that, and I made a mistake. For those of you who were offended by my response, I apologize, and I assure you that it will not happen again," Byrne wrote.

Aggies officials have tried to soothe upset fans by talking about the money, suggesting new TV deals will perhaps double the \$9.2 million paid out to the school by the Big 12 in 2009-10..

"The past two weeks have been a whirlwind of speculation," Texas A&M President R. Bowen Loftin said in a message to Aggies fans. "The Big 12 made a significant financial commitment to keep Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Texas in the conference. At the end of the day, we kept our word, which as an Aggie, is extremely important."

But it's about more than money for many Aggies fans.

Texas, the richest and most powerful school in the Big 12, has long cast a long shadow over College Station. Many Texas A&M fans saw the SEC as a way to strike out on their own, even at the risk of ending 100-plus years of rivalry.

"A&M fans love the rivalry. There's nothing that makes us Aggies happier in sports than beating Texas, I don't care what sport," Liucci said. "(But) A&M fans, they were fine with taking that risk."

The debate was so hot last week that Gov. Rick Perry, an Aggie who has been in office long enough to appoint every regent to both schools, decided it was best that he stay quiet.

In Austin, Texas fans were gripped by breathless reports that Texas was leaving for the Pac-10. Some wanted to stay, others were ready to go.

"I think there was a lot of excitement about the process and you all helped feed that, I appreciate that," Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds told reporters.

Austin radio talk show host Ed Clements said he hears from Longhorns fans who like staying in a league that promises an even fatter wallet and in theory puts them closer each year to a BCS bowl and the national championship.

But he also hears from fans disappointed they won't get side trips to California beaches and Disneyland out of the deal.

Just about everyone wants Texas to schedule better non-conference opponents.

"They want Notre Dame, Michigan or somebody really, really good," Clements said. "They say they're paying high ticket prices but are sick and tired of just seeing Iowa State, Missouri and Kansas."

Texas already has UCLA on the schedule the next two seasons and BYU comes to Austin in 2011. In 2012, Wyoming, Mississippi and Texas-El Paso make up the non-conference slate.

Texas football coach Mack Brown said he thinks Texas fans will like the new Big 12.

"It was best for our fans. A lot of people got excited about some of the (possible) games. We can schedule those games still," Brown said.

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Divisions still unsettled

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Bruce Pascoe | Posted: Friday, June 18, 2010 12:04 pm | Comments

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There is still no definitive word on how the Pac-10 will divide up divisions, which suggests there still is some debate among the schools involved.

No doubt that the Northwest schools don't want to miss out on annual trips to Los Angeles for football, much as Arizona didn't in football had it joined an eastern division with the would-be Big 12 additions.

With a southern division of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, ASU, USC and UCLA, you'd also have to split up California from its UC cousin in Los Angeles.

The Denver Post and Boulder Daily Camera have both reported that Colorado made being in a southern division a condition of joining the Pac-10, but Larry Scott told the Seattle Times that was not part of their agreement.

Scott said the league might not decide until sometime after the conference's annual football media day on July 29.

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On the previous discussion thread, Loumar floated another possibility for the much-discussed zipper format (splitting up the natural rivals all the way down the league) and Alexander asked about the rivalry games.

Under the zipper, you'd still have the rivals play each other once in football and twice in basketball. Here's how it could work:

Basketball: Play your rival and your five zipper division schools twice each, then face the other five schools once each. Total: 17 games.

Football: Play your rival and your five zipper division schools, plus two from the other division. Total: Eight games.

You could also change the zipper alignment at any time, though doing so could cause confusion.

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The Associated Press says the Pac-10's expansion efforts can't be fully judged until new TV deals and a possible new TV network are in place for after 2011-12.

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The Mountain West says it's also done expanding for now, having gone from the possibility of adding Big 12 leftovers to just adding Boise State and losing Utah.

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Houston wants in the Big 12. Wonder how the Longhorns feel about that.

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Dick Vitale has only one Pac-10 team -- Washington -- in his early Top 40, which contains four UA opponents next season.

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USF has been placed on probation for violations that include using the telephone access code of former coach Jessie Evans (an assistant on UA's 1997 title team).

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Debate on why Steve Kerr left the Suns continues.

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On the previous discussion thread, Carlos wondered if the Pac-10 could still look to Texas in the future: There still is a lot of talk that the superconferences could still happen in the future, maybe even replacing the BCS system in the process. But I wouldn't expect another seismic movement for at least another five years or so now that new TV deals are about to be struck.

He also asked about the Colorado-Utah recruiting tie: I believe the last player from those states to play for UA was Quynn Tebbs (from Utah), a reserve guard who transferred near home to Weber State in 1998.

Posted in Pascoe on *Friday, June 18, 2010 12:04 pm* Updated: 12:19 pm.

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