

Woelk: As expansion tremors rumble, Big 12 sits on shaky ground

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 06/02/2010 12:20:29 AM MDT

There is a chance -- just a chance, mind you -- that this week might prove to be the one we'll all remember as the time when the Big 12 began to head down the road of its predecessors.

Remember the Big Eight? Remember the Southwest Conference?

There might come a day when we speak of the Big 12 in the same vein.

This week, the Big 12, Pac-10 and SEC will all hold their annual spring meetings. But the tenor of the respective meetings will be vastly different.

The SEC, one of the richest and healthiest conferences in the nation, will discuss business as usual. That means how to keep the nation's most powerful football conference on top of the heap, a topic that could very well lend itself to a discussion of expansion.

In San Francisco, the Pac-10 will no doubt have expansion on the table. The Pac-10 is actively pursuing a plan to increase revenue to a level that's at least in the same neighborhood as the Big Ten and SEC, and expansion is the clearest path.

And the Big 12? There will be no grand plans, no visions of grandeur in Kansas City this week. Nobody is clamoring to join the Big 12.

Rather, Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe has the unenviable task of attempting to convince his troops to stick together. As he told a newspaper last week, his strategy will be "convincing, persuading, cajoling and making recommendations."

Good luck. As conferences from coast to coast have their eyes on Big 12 teams, the chances of the Big 12 remaining intact become slimmer and slimmer.

Beebe has spent the last few weeks doing his best to convince Big 12 members that they must present a united front. The commissioner has been asking athletic directors from Lincoln to Lubbock to publicly pronounce their commitment to the conference.

Their silence has been deafening.

There's even been talk that Beebe will push the conference board of directors to significantly increase the penalty for leaving. Trouble is, he needs a 75 percent vote of the board to do that, meaning a "nay" from four schools would shoot such a plan down.

"I'm going to put to our membership that they quit deciding how to react and just go forward," Beebe told the Dallas Morning News earlier this week. "We're going forward, this plane is going to take off and we're going to see who is on board."

Beebe could be putting his tray table up on a half-empty plane.

It's no secret that Nebraska and Missouri have their eyes on the Big Ten. Closer to home, Colorado has been prominently mentioned as a candidate for inclusion in Pac-10 expansion.

And none of the athletic directors involved -- from Nebraska's Tom Osborne to Mizzou's Mike Alden to CU's Mike Bohn -- have done anything to quell that speculation.

The man with the key, however, doesn't live in Lincoln, Columbia or Boulder.

Right now, the athletic director of the most powerful athletic department in the nation resides in Austin, Texas.

Everyone wants the Longhorns -- and whoever convinces DeLoss Dodds that their deal is the best could suddenly become the biggest dog on the block.

Three major conferences are courting the `Horns.

Here's what Drew Sharp of the Detroit Free Press recently wrote: "... should the Big Ten fail in luring either Texas or the Irish, any new 14- or 16-team realignment would stand considerably shy of college sports' first true super conference. ... It's only 'super' if it includes the Texas Longhorns or Notre Dame."

From John Adams of the Knoxville News-Sentinel: "Unless the SEC at least gets Texas, it's not going to hit the expansion jackpot. The Longhorns would strengthen the SEC significantly in baseball and basketball as well as football. They would expand the conference borders all the way to New Mexico. And they would bring prestige as well as millions of more television viewers."

Then there's the Pac-10.

When talk of Pac-10 expansion first started, the general theory was that it would grow by two teams. But now, talk is that the West Coast folks could be considering adding as many as six to form the first college football super conference.

From Bud Withers of the Seattle Times: "Here's the Pac-10's quickest route to the bank vault: Texas. There's a scenario by which Texas, which has the fifth- and 10th-largest TV markets in Dallas and Houston, respectively, could become available. If the Big 12 begins to crumble with exits by Missouri and Nebraska, the Longhorns may be looking for a soft landing."

And where Texas goes, Texas A&M will follow closely.

I can't see Texas heading to the SEC. The Longhorns are familiar with conferences where NCAA violations are a matter of course (remember the SWC?), and I can't see them jumping into such a morass again. Neither can I see UT getting excited about competing with LSU, Florida, Alabama and Georgia on an annual basis.

The Big Ten might be slightly more appealing, but I'm not sure the Longhorns' fan base would be thrilled about traveling to the Midwest annually.

The Pac-10 seems to be the best fit -- and if Texas and A&M decide to head West, the conference's expansion would also likely include CU, Utah and two other teams (Baylor? Texas Tech? Boise State? BYU?) for a 16-team conference.

No doubt, what the Pac-10 decides will greatly impact Colorado -- but much of it hinges on Texas.

That move could come as soon as this weekend.

Today, what we have is a group of conferences across the land, all itching to take the arms race lead, all with their hands on the trigger. Sooner or later, someone is going to squeeze. Someone is going to fire the first shot.

And when that happens, I'm afraid the Big 12's only choice will be to duck -- and try to pick up the pieces when the shooting is over.

Close Window

Send To Printer

Big 12 seeks commitment

Commissioner Beebe touts benefits of staying in league

Associated Press
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 06/02/2010 12:19:33 AM MDT

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- With speculation swirling about Missouri and Nebraska being targets for possible Big Ten expansion, commissioner Dan Beebe opened the Big 12's spring meetings Tuesday with a plea for staying together.

At the same time, Beebe agreed there was little chance the Big 12's future would be decided before the meetings adjourn on Friday afternoon. No decision by Missouri, Nebraska or anybody else about leaving the conference is expected for several months.

"I want to talk frankly about whether there's a date certain that our institutions can commit to the conference so that we know who's on board as we go forward," Beebe told a news conference.

He said he hopes to get long-term commitments from his members before the meetings close Friday.

"I don't know if that's realistic," he said.

Beebe and others such as Kansas athletic director Lew Perkins will be urging that the conference remain intact.

"We have described the fact that we have a great conference that has provided a lot of benefit to all our institutions," said Beebe. "I think we have a tremendous group of institutions that have benefited greatly (from the Big 12)."

The Big Ten, enriched by its own cable network, has indicated it is looking into adding teams and said in December it would take 12-18 months for the conference to decide what it is going to do.

Last year, Big 12 schools divided between \$7 million and \$12 million depending on how many appearances they made on regional and national TV. That means Texas usually pockets the biggest share, with the likes of Missouri lagging behind. Meanwhile, Big Ten schools share equally and came away with more than \$20 million each.

Adding to the Big 12's distress are reports that Colorado could be looking at the Pac-10 and Texas might be checking out other options.

"I would be negligent if I wasn't looking at what possibilities there are for any scenario that might exist," Beebe said.

"We're not doing anything outward, but inwardly we're doing a lot of research in case there might be any change in the whole landscape. We're not just sitting there and waiting for the best possible outcome for us. We're looking at all possible outcomes."

Nebraska athletic director Tom Osborne and Missouri's Mike Alden both said only that the first day went well.

"We had a very productive meeting," said Osborne.

Texas, the richest and most powerful Big 12 member, remains the lynchpin of the entire league. The other 10 schools could probably work something out if Nebraska and Missouri left. But if the Longhorns pull up stakes, it could prove devastating to the league.

"You've known me for very long, I am not hanging back," Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds said. "I'm not waiting to see what other people are going to do. I'm going to know what our options are, so that's not going to change. My hope is that the Big 12 survives and you and I retire knowing it's a great conference. It's been very viable, and if it stays in place, it will continue to be very viable."

Dodds noted that Texas was not the one that started realignment talk.

"If we need to finish it, we'll finish it," he said. "We're going to be a player in whatever happens."

The population and potential television audience in the state of Texas was what prompted the old Big Eight schools in the more sparsely populated Midwest to join Texas, Texas Tech, Texas A&M and Baylor and form the Big 12 14 years ago.

"We're watching what's happening with the Big Ten, probably to a lesser degree to the Southeastern Conference," Dodds said. "If the landscape is going to change, we're going to be a part of it and be a viable part of it. Texas will come out of it in good shape."

Beebe will need to know what schools make up the Big 12 when he opens negotiations next April on a new television agreement with Fox. He's hopeful he'll be able to greatly increase the league's revenue. The ACC has been reported in trade journals to have agreed to a 12-year, \$1.86 billion deal with ESPN that would just about double its schools' television revenue.

"The media deal with the ACC was very encouraging," Beebe said. "I don't think (television money) is the only factor in anybody's interest in conference membership. There are others. But that's one of the major ones, and I think we have a great future."

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

sports

Big 12 anxious to find out who's in for long haul

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 06/02/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 06/02/2010 01:11:38 PM MDT



Could Colorado and Nebraska end up in different leagues? (AP)

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe refers to conference realignment as "that elephant in the room." At the Big 12 spring meetings Tuesday, the jokes stopped there.

"I'm worried every day what will happen," Kansas athletic director Lew Perkins said. "This is

serious, serious, serious stuff."

How serious? The nerves among conference athletic directors seem similar to those in the locker room before any Big 12 championship football game. With the national conference landscape beginning to rumble, Beebe is frantically securing his constituents before his conference is altered forever.

The Big Ten, Southeastern and Pac-10 all have publicly stated they are looking to expand for more revenue. Colorado, Texas, Nebraska and Missouri have given every indication they will listen. That's why Beebe is busy talking. The Big 12 is vulnerable, and Beebe knows it.

"Look, we're the conference that has been together the least amount of time of any in the country," he said. "We haven't gone through one generation of fans and supporters and students who only know this conference as the place that their institution competes. So there's some sense to an evaluation of whether this makes sense to institutions.

"I just want them to come to that conclusion pretty quickly."

There is a time element in this. The Big 12's Fox Sports-ESPN television contract runs out after the 2011-12 fiscal year, and Beebe will begin negotiations next April. Combined with the ABC-ESPN deal that runs through 2015-16, Big 12 schools last year received \$7 million to \$12 million each.

Advertisement

Print Advertisement

Identity Theft Protection

ENROLL TODAY AND GET:
30 DAY RISK-FREE* TRIAL

USE PROMO CODE:
ID

CALL NOW: **1-888-896-1878**

 **LifeLock.**
#1 In Identity Theft Protection*

*At the end of the 30-day free period your card will be billed automatically (\$10.00 monthly/\$110.00 annually) unless you cancel within the 30-day period. You can cancel anytime without penalty by calling 1-800-LifeLock. Offer is for new LifeLock members only.

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

The Big Ten, strengthened by its powerful Big Ten Network, gave its schools \$20 million to \$22 million each, and the SEC gave \$17 million. Beebe would like to know which Big 12 schools are with him when he meets with the suits from TV.

Nearly all Big 12 athletic directors declined comment Tuesday, but DeLoss Dodds of Texas, next to Notre Dame the biggest

Blog: All Things Buffs



The Post's Tom Kensler posts analysis, notes and minutiae on this blog devoted to CU athletics.

pawn in the realignment chess game, unabashedly said he will look around.

"If you've known me very long, I'm not hanging back to see what people are going to do," Dodds said. "I'm going to know what our options are going to be. That's not going to change."

Beebe said part of his persuasion will be to project future revenues. The Atlantic Coast

Conference helped last month when it signed a 12-year, \$1.86 billion contract with ESPN, doubling the ACC's football income.

In every area of comparison, the Big 12 is a more attractive football conference than the ACC. Beebe, however, isn't just trying to entice members with TV dollars. He's showing the negatives of joining proposed super conferences.

"It's going to be a sad day and very difficult not to have a lot more intervention and legal issues attached to those institutions," Beebe said. "Pressure will be immense for programs to be successful. There will be more churning of coaches, less chances of winning conference and national championships."

Beebe said he has not received a phone call from Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany seeking permission to talk to Big 12 schools. The Big 12 does have a complicated exit fee. But whatever penalty Missouri would suffer, it could make up within two years of the Big Ten's lucrative TV deal.

Donnie Duncan was Oklahoma's AD when the Big Eight and Southwest Conference formed the Big 12, starting with the 1996-97 school year. Now a Big 12 consultant, he shares the concern.

"Where the concern comes from is that this conference was formed for the right reasons and those reasons still remain the same," Duncan said. "But that was then and this is now. Environments change. Leadership changes."

Advertisement



Save \$26 a month
and lock in your price for ONE YEAR!
Switch today! 1-877-866-8603

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

And that has athletic directors in the Big 12 looking warily at the AD next to them, admittedly a little nervous.

"The Big Ten has been in existence for 100 years," Perkins said. "The Big 12, we're teenagers. We're just young kids. I want to grow up with my siblings."

*John Henderson: 303-954-1299 or
jhenderson@denverpost.com*

Advertisement

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



Without evidence, Big 12 commish has reasonable doubt about Big Ten growth

June 1, 2010

By **Dennis Dodd**

CBSSports.com Senior Writer

Tell Dennis your opinion!

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- What if nothing happens?

If you have to ask the particulars, then your college football offseason hasn't been ruined by 10 times more speculation than fact. If you need a clearer definition, you've been slobbering over erroneous radio reports that Notre Dame has been invited to the Big Ten.

Video Podcast



Big Ten Expansion

Adam Aizer, J. Darin Darst and Dennis Dodd chat about what to expect next with the Big Ten. [Watch!](#)

Links

Infographic: [The future of college football?](#)

Dodd: [Missouri feels it deserves invite](#)

Dodd: [Population could be major factor](#)

Dodd: [K.C. commission talks to Mizzou](#)

Dodd: [Nobody talking about expansion report](#)
[Big Ten commish quashes expansion rumors](#)

Darst: [Big East basically has two options](#)

Dodd: [Part IV: Variables could spawn revolution](#)

Dodd: [Part III: Texas would cause domino effect](#)

Dodd: [Part II: A look at the Big Ten Network](#)

Dodd: [Part I: The sport will never be the same](#)

Dodd: [Paterno thinks expansion is coming](#)

Dodd: [Delany, Big Ten may swallow Irish](#)

In the Trenches: [Big East might be left out](#)

SI.com: [Conferences wait on Big Ten's move](#)

SB Nation: [Big East will not exist in 2013](#)

Community links

[Talk about Big Ten expansion](#)

[Big Ten: Who is coming?](#)

Expansion talk has scared the majority of the nation's athletic directors and kept a raft of sports talk shows on the air the past few months. Nothing more, really. The Big Ten supposedly is about to make the biggest hostile takeover since German tanks rolled into Poland.

But look at the tangible evidence, the stuff we can hold in our hands. There is little of it. Since December, we have little more to go on than [some disparaging remarks from the Missouri governor](#), a statement from Missouri's chancellor and lots and lots of want-to from the alumni.

A bunch of us went up to Chicago last month for the Big Ten spring meetings to listen to Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany talk about Rust Belt population shift to the Sun Belt. That's a subject that is 30 years old. Maybe we haven't been paying attention. At the end of each public statement about the issue, Delany continues to keep emphasizing the *if* when it comes to expansion, never the *when*.

The SEC has become a counterbalance in the expansion issue. It has basically threatened a mega-expansion of its own if the Big Ten becomes too big, too fast.

So what if nothing happens in conference expansion? Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe considered the question Tuesday and rated the chances of his conference staying together.

"Very high," he said at the conclusion of the first day of the Big 12 spring meetings.

Of course, Beebe is not exactly an objective source. He knows his conference could be on the brink of collapse if the Big Ten takes Missouri and Nebraska, as has been speculated. Colorado is a candidate for the Pac-10. Even Kansas AD Lew Perkins hinted Tuesday he might have gotten a call from the Big Ten.

But that's the problem. All this has been mostly conjecture. It's based on the Big Ten's December announcement that will study expansion.

"Is there substance to it?" Beebe said. "I think there are folks talking certainly in case things shift, but nobody knows for sure what everybody else is thinking."

Beebe is a knowledgeable source. He is a lawyer and a former NCAA investigator. He has to know that not much has changed since December in the biggest truth that matters: The only slam-dunk Big Ten expansion involves Texas or Notre Dame. He has to know that by now, both have said no or are leaning that way. Plan B, then, involves trying to decide which combination of one, three or five schools make the most sense for Big Ten expansion.

Beebe didn't sound like an idiot when he concluded that maybe zero is the best number for the Big Ten.

"If we come to a day where there are four, 16-member conferences ... it's going to be a sad day," he said. "It's going to be

very difficult to not have a lot more intervention and legal issues attached to those institutions. The pressures will be immense for certain programs to be successful. You'll see a lot more churning of coaches and [pressure on] athletic administrators to be successful. There will be less chances to win conference championships and national championships for certain programs."

Beebe says the "balance" in college athletics is harmonious at this point. Argue about the BCS all you want, but a boatload more schools can play for the championship than before it started. Ask Boise State, which will start the season ranked in the top five. The NCAA did the right thing, at least for the moment, expanding its perfect basketball tournament by only three teams.

Even a single 16-team Big Ten might bring down those unanticipated forces. Sen. Orrin Hatch has his anti-trust issues with the BCS. What would he think of one conference that will have lapped the field in terms of revenue, exposure and power?

"I would assume that's part of their [Big Ten's] evaluation," Beebe said. 'If we do this and ... it disrupts what we have, what are we really going to bring on ourselves?' "

Sure, a UConn would certainly hit the jackpot in the Big Ten but it would seldom, if ever, get to the Rose Bowl. In the Big East (as long as that league stays around), Randy Edsall is one of the brilliant, up-and-coming coaches in the profession. In the Big Ten, he's Bret Bielema Lite. In the Big East, Edsall is competing for a BCS bowl. In the Big Ten, he's lucky to get to the Alamo Bowl.

In the Big East, UConn is somebody. In the Big Ten it is "inventory". That's Delany's term for conference games to be bartered over and sold to the highest bidder.

Missouri, a middling football program for most of its history, doesn't figure to rule the Big Ten. What happens to Nebraska's tradition of championships in a 16-team Big Ten?

For all the Michigan-Ohio State games, there are also going to be a lot of Michigan State-Rutgers matchups. Is any of that enough to keep the Big Ten from offering and candidates from accepting? Probably not. The *Chicago Tribune* reported earlier this year that the Big Ten expects to double its revenue (currently at \$22 million per year) in coming years.

But does the Big Ten want to share that revenue with strangers? Sixteen teams is a lot of mouths to feed. The Big Ten reportedly has hired search and investment firms to vet expansion candidates. What if -- assuming there is no Notre Dame or Texas -- those firms come back with these chilling assessments?:

Syracuse, Rutgers and Connecticut aren't going to deliver the New York market.

Those 2.5 million households in Missouri don't mean squat.

Pittsburgh? Really?

Beebe is counting on it. He's also counting on a windfall from Fox next year when the Big 12's cable partner has an exclusive 30-day negotiating window. ESPN recently doubled the revenue for the ACC -- a league that has been a borderline failure in football since expansion and has damaged its brand in basketball. Fox reportedly finished a very aggressive No. 2 in the bidding. Just think what the Big 12 could get if it keeps everyone in the fold.

Big 12 teams currently make between \$7 million-\$12 million in the conference's uneven revenue distribution payout. Would \$15 million on the top end be enough to keep Nebraska and Missouri to stay? \$17 million? The Big 12 might be able to get it.

Or it might not matter at all.

Beebe basically admitted that the meetings will end on Friday without a firm commitment from Missouri or Nebraska -- or Colorado or Kansas or Texas for that matter. Longhorns AD DeLoss Dodds reminded everyone on Tuesday that his school has the most leverage of any in the Big 12.

"We're," Dodds said, "going to be a player in whatever happens."

Just in case you forgot.

Beebe would like to know who is on board by the time the TV negotiations start in April. One huge problem: The Big Ten is saying their expansion study might last another year.

"At what point do we decide whether we can close the plane doors and take off?" he said. "I might be told that the doors have to remain open for a lot longer than I'm comfortable with."

The Big 12 probably could get by with 10 teams. (Suggested new conference name: Pure Prairie League.) There suddenly

seems to be a lot of money available, even outside the Big Ten. In the next 12 years, Beebe's is only one of three major conferences that have TV deals to renegotiate. The Pac-10 and Big East are the others.

A Big 12/Pac-10 partnership, already in discussions, seems like a no-brainer. If that occurs, there would be no point in Colorado switching leagues. CU's athletic department is rumored to be upside down financially. It might have to fire and buy out Dan Hawkins in less than a year, then spend \$3 million (on the low end) to hire a new staff. That's not counting the \$5 million-\$7 million it would pay to buy out of the Big 12.

Hey, another reason for nothing to happen.

"Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between hope and projection," the commissioner said.

Beebe hopes his 15-year-old league stays together. The projection is that it won't.

For more from Dennis Dodd, check him out on Twitter: [@dennisdoddcb](#)s

CBS Sports is a registered trademark of CBS Broadcasting Inc. SportsLine is a registered service mark of SportsLine.com, Inc.