

Conference conundrum: Pac-10 move expensive, but could be worth it for CU Buffs

By Kyle Ringo, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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The Pac-10 Conference is considering expanding to 12 teams and instituting a conference championship game in football with an eye toward increasing revenue. If approved, the Pac-10 would expand in the fall of 2012 when its new television contracts would begin.

The University of Colorado heads a shortlist of possible additions because it fits the conference's profile academically and geographically and would bring the valuable Denver television market to the Pac-10. Utah is another likely choice for the same reasons and its connection to the Salt Lake City market. Texas, Texas A&M and Nebraska also are possibilities.

Today the Camera begins a multi-day series looking at the possibilities and ramifications of a move west for the Buffs. It was an option considered once before in 1994 and ultimately voted down 6-3 by the CU Board of Regents.

Nine million dollars.

It's the initial price tag for the University of Colorado to move from the Big 12 Conference to the Pac-10 by 2012.

The biggest question from the Colorado perspective, if the Pac-10 comes calling, is whether absorbing the initial cost of switching conferences is too much or if it's a small price to pay in the long run to be in a conference in which many believe CU is a better fit.

Under Big 12 rules, Colorado must give two years notice if it plans to withdraw from the league and would forfeit 50 percent of its conference distribution for both of those years.

CU received \$9.7 million from the Big 12 for the 2008-09 school year and is expecting about \$9 million this year because the league had only one team in a Bowl Championship Series football game.

Assuming those numbers remain consistent over the next two years, it would cost Colorado roughly \$4.5 million per year or \$9 million over two years to leave the Big 12. The fall of 2012 is the target date for any possible Pac-10 expansion because that is when its new television agreements will begin.

It's possible CU could give one year's notice in the summer of 2011 and end up paying roughly the same amount by forfeiting 90 percent of one year of Big 12 revenue. The cost also could grow if the Pac-10 required an entry fee, but that is unlikely.

The CU athletic department budget has been about \$45 million the past two years, which means losing \$4.5 million in one year equates to a 10-percent shortfall.

The \$9 million price tag to leave the Big 12 has raised a few eyebrows around the Boulder campus in recent weeks as speculation of a change in conferences has heated up. Remember this is a school that balked at firing its 16-33 football coach last year because paying a \$3 million separation package was viewed as too steep a price.

It is unlikely Colorado's athletic department could foot that \$9 million bill on its own and would look to the school, the CU system and donors to help. That could be a tough sell in the current economic environment with state funding shortfalls and budget cutbacks on campus.

Yet, even with the substantial up-front cost, moving to the Pac-10 will remain a popular idea in the athletic department, among faculty and with many alumni because of the benefits it brings on the fields of play, in the classrooms and in fundraising.

The popularity of the idea has been demonstrated by all the attention it has generated in the media. It also is seen in other ways such as a group of fans who recently started a Facebook page "Fans of CU joining the Pac-10," which has grown to almost 1,000 members.

Colorado chancellor Phil DiStefano and athletic director Mike Bohn said this week the school has not been contacted by any other conference about switching leagues and they remain focused on being a member of the Big 12.

"We're committed to the Big 12 Conference. We're committed to being competitive in the Big 12 Conference," Bohn said in a meeting with reporters last month. "However, there is a different feel right now about different movement across the country. So we're mindful of that and we're trying to do everything we can to ensure that we're supportive of the Big 12 and supportive of the league we're in."

DiStefano declined the opportunity to address conference change issues. CU spokesman Bronson Hilliard said there is no formal process spelled out at Colorado for approving a change in conference affiliation, but the school would follow procedures used in the past and require a majority of vote by the Board of Regents to make a change.

Allure of alumni

So what's the attraction for the Buffs?

One university official used an anecdote from the 2007 football season to illustrate the potential benefits of switching conferences. Colorado played a nonconference game in football at Arizona State in Tempe, Ariz., that season. The game attracted more than 7,000 CU fans from the area and nearby Southern California.

The weekend became a series of fundraising opportunities for regents and school administrators who attended breakfasts, lunches and dinners and small parties in between.

Another similar weekend is expected this fall when CU plays at Cal in September. If a decision hasn't been made by then, it could be an opportunity for Buffs fans to make an impression on Pac-10 officials.

CU is generally fortunate to have 1,000 fans at a Big 12 road game. According to CU's alumni statistics provided to the Camera, Colorado has a total of 4,523 alumni in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma combined. The largest numbers of alumni in another Big 12 state are the 6,244 in Texas.

By comparison, there are 23,137 CU alumni in California, 3,755 in Arizona, 2,983 in Oregon and 5,113 in Washington. That's 34,988 alumni in Pac-10 conference territory compared to 10,767 in Big 12 country. Another 1,200 CU alums live in Utah.

Faculty connection

Greater fundraising opportunities are just part of the Pac-10 appeal for Colorado.

The Pac-10 Conference is made up of largely of Association of American Universities research institutions, with a total of seven in the conference. While the Big 12 also has seven, those in the Pac-10 are generally rated higher than those in the Big 12.

"The faculty overall on campus in their academic and research work would feel a stronger connection to Pac-10 institutions than to Big 12 institutions," CU faculty athletic representative David Clough said.

Clough said CU is a better match with universities such as California, Stanford, UCLA and USC because of objective criteria such as research funding per faculty member, number of PhD's graduated, Nobel Prize winners and members of the National Academies.

On the field

It's unclear whether CU's teams would be more likely to produce winning seasons and conference championships in the Pac-10. The Buffs would still be looking up at many of their peers in terms of funding those efforts.

Colorado would have the 10th richest athletic department in a new Pac-12 that also included Utah based on revenue

reported to the Department of Education for the 2008-09 school year. CU ranked eighth in the Big 12 in total revenue during the 2008-09 year, the most recent year for which complete data is available.

CU reported revenue of \$49,859,693 that year. Only Washington State and Utah reported less. However, Arizona, Arizona State and Oregon State each surpassed CU by \$4 million or less.

Other notable comparisons:

CU would have the seventh largest enrollment in the Pac-12 using figures from this year.

It would have the fewest number of teams competing in the Pac-12 at 16. Stanford, by comparison, would have twice as many with 32.

CU would have the eighth largest football stadium in the Pac-12 and the seventh largest basketball arena.

If Colorado and Utah joined the league, CU would be the only school in the league without a baseball team.

Parting with the past

The drawbacks to the Buffs switching conferences are few.

Most notably, it would be parting with a lot of history. CU has been in the same conference with every member of the Big 12 North Division and Oklahoma since the Big Seven Conference was formed in 1948.

The Buffs would probably no longer play Nebraska on an annual basis if Colorado made the move and wouldn't have a true conference rival, at least in the first few years of the Pac-12. Meetings with Colorado State might take on more significance, especially if the Big 12 decided to try to keep a foothold in the Denver television market by either inviting Colorado State to replace the Buffs or scheduling CSU more often in more sports.

Another minor drawback to leaving the Big 12 for the Pac-10 would be longer road trips. There isn't a Pac-10 school within 1,000 miles of Boulder. But as one CU coach said, "We already get on a plane to go play every conference road game anyway."

Television is king

Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott stirred expansion talk last month when he acknowledged everything is on the table as the conference looks to play catch-up in generating revenue for its members. Adding two new schools is necessary so the conference can meet the NCAA requirement for a 12-team league to have a championship game in football.

Selecting those teams would be done with academics, television market and geographic location in mind, probably in that order.

Expanding the conference's exposure to include the Denver and Salt Lake City television markets would significantly aid the conference as it begins to discuss future television agreements early next year. It would also make the idea of creating a Pac-10 network more feasible because it would be desired in a larger portion of the country. CU and Utah would give the Pac-10 a permanent link to the Mountain Time zone.

"I think what we would be looking at, and I have said this, is schools would have to add a tremendous amount of value for it to make sense because, of course, if you expand, you have to divide the pie in more ways, and critically to our schools and their leadership, schools would have to be compatible academically," Scott said in an interview with the Sports Business Daily.

The Pac-10 paid out approximately \$100 million to its 10 members last year compared with \$132 million distributed by the Big 12 and \$242 million by the Big Ten.

According to a recent Sports Illustrated article citing 2007 tax filings as the basis for its information, the Pac-10 paid its members between \$7 and \$11.5 million that year. The Big 12 paid its members between \$7 and \$12 million the same year.

By comparison the Southeastern Conference paid its members approximately \$11 million each and the Atlantic Coast

Conference paid members between \$11.2 million and \$12.2 million.

The Big Ten, the only BCS conference to start its own television network, has far surpassed those totals, paying its members \$22 million a piece last year.

Scott said during a recent interview on ESPN Radio that the entire Pac-10 will make close to \$60 million in television revenue this year. The conference does not divide television money equally, which allowed a program such as Southern Cal in a large media market with many of its games on television to rake in \$6.5 million in television money in 2008 while Washington State made just \$3 million.

It is probably not possible for the Pac-10 to increase its revenue enough to catch up to other conferences without expanding and adding the championship game. The Big 12 and SEC each value their conference championships in football at \$12-15 million. The games bring about \$1 million to each school after expenses. Adding a conference championship game in the Pac-10 would likely produce similar numbers.

"We've got a big step up we're looking for in terms of our next round of media negotiations, and that's why everything is on the table," Scott said in the interview with ESPN. Scott has not responded to an interview request from the Camera through the Pac-10 communications staff.

Decision time

The first opportunity for Pac-10 presidents and chancellors to discuss expansion could come this week at the conference basketball tournament in Los Angeles. However, the Pac-10 Chief Executive Officers Group is not slated to meet until June 5-6 in the Bay Area, likely the earliest a decision about expansion would be made. The league's offices are located in Walnut Creek, Calif., about 25 miles east of San Francisco.

Pac-10 associate commissioner Jim Muldoon said a decision to expand requires a unanimous vote from the CEO group. Muldoon said the only requirements for admission to the league, should it decide to expand, are that a school fields 16 sports teams, the NCAA minimum for Division I status, and that it compete in football, men's and women's basketball and women's volleyball. Colorado and Utah both meet that criteria.

The Pac-10 sponsors 11 men's and women's sports and also is a member of the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation in four additional men's sports (gymnastics, indoor track, volleyball and water polo) and three women's sports (indoor track and field, lacrosse and water polo).

Colorado and Utah would both bring skiing to the conference, giving the Pac-10 an opportunity to win a national title it has no access to currently.

The league has won 383 national titles (through the 2008-09 school year) in 29 men's and women's sports -- with the first by Cal in men's track in 1922.

With such a history, the Pac-10 calls itself "The Conference of Champions." Adding two teams to its membership will only give the conference more opportunities to add to its legacy.

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Woelk: If invitation sent, Buffs can't turn down Pac-10 again

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If the phone rings, Colorado should answer and say "Yes."

Go west, young Buffs, and don't look back.

Don't make the same mistake CU officials made in December 1994, when they had the chance to join the Pac-10 but turned it down. Don't spend another 15 years wondering -- again -- what might have been.

If the door opens, don't wait for it to slam shut this time around.

When the Pac-10 came calling in 1994, CU was already in the process of working toward formation of the Big 12. The Southwest Conference was imploding and the Big Eight needed to expand. It was the perfect convergence of circumstances.

But the Pac-10's invitation -- also extended to Texas at the time -- merited some serious thought. Serious enough, anyway, that it was brought to a vote before CU's regents.

The final tally was 5-4 to decline the invitation.

The irony? Had the vote been taken less than one month later, CU would be in the Pac-10 today. Three regents who had been elected in November 1994 were in favor of the move, but had not yet been sworn in as members. They were allowed to listen to the debate before the decision, but could not vote.

One month later, all three would have been official members of the board -- and all three would have voted to join the Pac-10. It would have been enough to send Colorado west.

Texas also seriously considered the invitation. At the time, a significant number of UT's administrators and faculty were in favor of the move.

But according to folks who were involved in the discussions back then, members of the Texas legislature stepped in. They didn't want the Longhorns to abandon their state brethren.

It was bad enough that SWC members Houston, TCU and SMU weren't going to be involved in the Big 12. Texas legislature folk did not want UT leaving Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor behind as well.

Thus, the Longhorns and Buffs stayed home and the Pac-10 stayed the same.

Today, I can't imagine the Pac-10 standing pat again. Not with so much money at stake.

The last time the Pac-10 expanded was 1978, when Arizona and Arizona State jumped from the WAC into the Pac-8.

Since then, every other major conference has expanded. The Big Ten added Penn State in 1990 and is seriously considering expansion again. The SEC added Arkansas and South Carolina in 1991. The Big 12 opened for business in 1996. Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College jumped from the Big East to the ACC in 2004-05, and the Big East then added five teams after the ACC's raid.

Now, the ACC, Big 12 and SEC have conference championship football games. The Big Ten wants one, which is why it is also considering expansion.

Now it's the Pac-10's turn -- and if the league wants to keep up with the competition, expansion appears to be the best bet.

By no means is it a guarantee. But in an era when money talks and television holds the purse strings, it's difficult to imagine any other way the conference can significantly increase its revenue stream.

Just how far behind is the Pac-10?

According to San Francisco columnist Ray Ratto, the Pac-10 made about \$43 million from its television deal in 2008. That same year, the Big Ten Network provided the conference with roughly \$66 million. The Big 12 generated about \$57 million in TV money that year.

Since then, the Big Ten, Big 12 and SEC have increased their TV revenues.

The Pac-10 has remained stagnant -- which means it's actually losing ground every day.

Thus, if the Pac-10 wants to keep up with its BCS brethren, it needs to produce more money. If it wants to produce more money, it needs a bigger television contract (or its own network). If it wants a bigger television contract, it must give the networks a more appealing package.

All of which leads to a simple solution: Add two teams and their additional television markets, add a conference championship game for football and significantly increase marketing potential across the West.

Seems like a no-brainer.

Not that there wouldn't be obstacles for Colorado. As Camera staffer Kyle Ringo points out in today's paper, the move could initially cost CU in the neighborhood of \$9 million.

That's a significant chunk of change -- enough, anyway, that I'm sure it would draw the attention of budget-minded CU prez Bruce Benson.

But Benson and other CU officials must look at the cost as an investment, not a penalty.

The marketing and fundraising possibilities that would exist if CU had a steady West Coast presence would be enormous. CU would likely not only recoup its original athletic department investment in a few years; it would also significantly increase its overall fundraising income.

Finances wouldn't be the only hurdle. CU would have to consider travel costs, time difference and scheduling issues, just to name a few. The list would be lengthy.

But the overall benefits would far outweigh the negatives. Academically, athletically -- you name it -- the Pac-10 is a better fit for Colorado.

If the opportunity arises again, it's one Colorado shouldn't turn down.

Not this time around.

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Get to know the Pac-10

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
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Arizona

Location: Tucson

Enrollment: 37,500

Nickname: Wildcats

Colors: Cardinal and navy

President: Dr. Robert Shelton

Athletic director: Kathleen LaRose (interim)

Sports teams (18): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field.
Women -- Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Arizona Stadium (Capacity 57,400; grass)

Basketball arena: McKale Memorial Center (14,545)

Web site: arizonawildcats.com

Arizona State

Location: Tempe

Enrollment: 67,082

Nickname: Sun Devils

Colors: Maroon and gold

President: Dr. Michael Crow

Athletic director: Lisa Love

Sports teams (19): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, swimming and diving, track and field, wrestling. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo.

Football stadium: Sun Devil Stadium (71,705; grass)

Basketball arena: Wells Fargo Arena (14,198)

Web site: thesundevils.com

California

Location: Berkeley

Enrollment: 35,409

Nickname: Golden Bears

Colors: Blue and gold

Chancellor: Dr. Robert J. Birgeneau

Athletic director: Sandy Barbour

Sports teams (27): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, gymnastics, rugby, rowing, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, water polo. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo.

Football stadium: Memorial Stadium (71,799; Sportex Turf)

Basketball arena: Haas Pavilion (11,877)

Web site: calbears.com

Oregon

Location: Eugene

Enrollment: 20,376

Nickname: Ducks

Colors: Green and yellow

President: Richard Lariviere

Athletic director: Mike Bellotti

Sports teams (17): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, tennis, track and field. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Autzen Stadium (54,000; Field Turf)

Basketball arena: McArthur Court (9,087)

Web site: goducks.com

Oregon State

Location: Corvallis

Enrollment: 20,200

Nickname: Beavers

Colors: Orange and black

President: Dr. Edward Ray

Athletic director: Bob DeCarolis

Sports teams (18): Men -- Baseball, basketball, rowing, football, golf, tennis, soccer, wrestling. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Reser Stadium (45,674; Field Turf)

Basketball arena: Gill Coliseum (10,400)

Web site: osubeavers.com

Stanford

Location: Stanford, Calif.

Enrollment: 13,198

Nickname: Cardinal

Colors: Cardinal and white

President: John Hennessy

Athletic director: Bob Bowlsby

Sports teams (32): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, fencing, football, golf, gymnastics, rowing, sailing, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo, wrestling. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, fencing, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, lightweight rowing, rowing, sailing, soccer, softball, squash, swimming and diving, synchronized swimming, tennis, track and field.

Football stadium: Stanford stadium (50,000; grass)

Basketball arena: Roscoe Maples Pavilion (7,233)

Web site: gostanford.com

UCLA

Location: Los Angeles

Enrollment: 39,500

Nickname: Bruins

Colors: Blue and gold

Chancellor: Dr. Gene Block

Athletic director: Daniel Guerrero

Sports teams (22): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo.

Football stadium: Rose Bowl (91,500; grass)

Basketball arena: Pauley Pavilion (12,819)

Web site: uclabruins.com

USC

Location: Los Angeles

Enrollment: 33,500

Nickname: Trojans

Colors: Cardinal and gold

President: Dr. Steven B. Sample

Athletic director: Mike Garrett

Sports teams (21): Men -- Baseball, basketball, football, golf, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, rowing, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo.

Football stadium: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (93,607; grass)

Basketball arena: Galen Center (10,258)

Web site: usctrojans.com

Washington

Location: Seattle

Enrollment: 42,000

Nickname: Huskies

Colors: Purple and gold

President: Dr. Mark Emmert

Athletic director: Scott Woodward

Sports teams (19): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, rowing, soccer, tennis, track and field. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, rowing, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Husky Stadium (72,500; Field Turf)

Basketball arena: Bank of America Pavilion (10,000)

Web site: gohuskies.com

Washington State

Location: Pullman

Enrollment: 23,300

Nickname: Cougars

Colors: Crimson and gray

President: Elson S. Floyd

Athletic director: Bill Moos

Sports teams (16): Men -- Baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, track and field. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, rowing, soccer, swimming, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Martin Stadium (35,117; Field Turf)

Basketball arena: Beasley Coliseum (12,058)

Web site: wsucougars.com

Possible Pac-10 additions Colorado

Location: Boulder

Enrollment: 30,128

Nickname: Golden Buffaloes

Colors: Silver, black and gold

President: Bruce Benson

Athletic director: Mike Bohn

Sports teams (16): Men -- Basketball, cross country, football, golf, skiing, track and field. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, golf, skiing, soccer, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Folsom Field (53,750; grass)

Basketball arena: Coors Events Center (11,064)

Web site: cubuffs.com

Utah

Location: Salt Lake City

Enrollment: 29,251

Nickname: Utes

Colors: Crimson and white

President: Michael K. Young

Athletic director: Dr. Chris Hill

Sports teams (16): Men -- Baseball, basketball, football, golf, skiing, swimming and diving, tennis. **Women --** Basketball, cross country, gymnastics, skiing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball.

Football stadium: Rice-Eccles Stadium (45,017; Field Turf)

Basketball arena: Jon M. Huntsman Center (15,000)

Web site: <http://utahutes.cstv.com/>

Note: The NCAA counts indoor and outdoor track as two separate sports.

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