

CU's Bohn says Big 12, Pac-10 discussing 'many fronts'

Possible TV partnerships on table

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Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn has spent much of the past three days in Phoenix with eight of his peers in the Big 12 Conference and nine athletic directors from the Pac-10 Conference as well as commissioners from both leagues discussing how the conferences can collaborate on a variety of issues in the future.

Months of speculation about the Pac-10 possibly inviting CU to leave the Big 12 and join its ranks would figure to make for some awkward moments, but Bohn said there have been none.

He said that while he has been involved in conversations about the future of the two conferences and possible changes across the college landscape, the topic of CU leaving one league for the other hasn't come up at all, not in group meetings or small private conversations.

"We're progressively looking at how to work together on many fronts," Bohn said, refusing to comment further.

Colorado is unique in that it is the only Bowl Championship Series school in the Mountain time zone year round. That fact alone has helped CU land more television exposure over the years even when wins have been at a premium in Boulder.

CU's connection to the Denver television market, the 16th largest in the nation, makes it attractive to both conferences and a key player in the current talks. It is a bridge school in many ways between the two leagues and two areas of the country.

Both conferences are scheduled to begin negotiations for future television rights within the next year. The Big 12 is under contract with ESPN/ABC through 2016, but its contract with Fox Sports Net is over in 2012. All of the Pac-10 television rights become available when its contracts with ESPN/ABC and FSN expire in 2012.

The possibility of the leagues negotiating together is the focus of the talks between the leagues but partnerships in officiating and scheduling are possible as well. The conferences already collaborate with a basketball series.

The Pac-10 is considering expanding to 12 teams to increase its television footprint and the amount of money it can command in the coming negotiations. Expanding to at least 12 teams would also allow the conference to hold a championship game in football, which would likely produce an addition \$10-\$15 million in revenue.

But if the Pac-10 can get a waiver from the NCAA, which mandates a league must have at least 12 teams to hold a football championship game, and if the Big 12 is willing to partner in television negotiations, there might not be a need for the Pac-10 to expand.

If Colorado was to leave the Big 12 for another conference, it would have to provide two years notice and give up half its conference distribution for two years, a total of at least \$9 million based on distributions in recent years.

But with conference realignments and expansions possibly affecting a dozen or more schools and multiple conferences around the nation, it's also possible that conference commissioners would agree to waive fees to allow moves to be made relatively smoothly.

While there has been some speculation that the leagues might be discussing a merger, Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe told The Dallas Morning News that the conferences intended to keep separate identities.

"There's no desire to merge the two," he said.

Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott told the Los Angeles Times that he agreed with Beebe's assessment.

"That is not the primary focus at this point in time," he said. "I think short term, it's off the table. But in the little time I've been in college sports ... I hesitate to say anything is off the table in the long term."

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