

MWC's Thompson praises CU's Bohn

Two worked closely together during conference expansion talks

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COLORADO SPRINGS -- Colorado belongs in the Mountain West Conference.

During the wild two-week conference realignment frenzy, that was a popular opinion on the Baylor message boards and even an argument made by a Denver columnist.

It was Craig Thompson who actually squashed the rumor that the Buffs might be forced to join the same conference as Air Force and Colorado State. How did the MWC commissioner know CU would be landing in the Pac-10?

The Buffs athletic director kept him informed.

"I want to single out one person in this room who was very professional during all of this, and that's Mike Bohn," Thompson said during the Sports Corp kickoff luncheon. "He is someone I can trust."

Bohn worked in the athletic departments at Air Force and Colorado State and was also the athletic director at San Diego State, another member of the MWC, before taking the job at CU.

Had Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech joined CU in the Pac-10, the Big 12 would have likely crumbled and the MWC would have been in position to possibly scoop up Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri (TCU officials were lobbying against Baylor).

Instead, a 10-team Big 12 was salvaged. That led to the MWC losing Utah to the Pac-10 and adding Boise State from the WAC.

"We're thrilled to death," Thompson said of replacing the Utes, a program that upset Alabama in the Sugar Bowl, with the BCS-busters from Boise. "The Broncos are 26-1 the last two seasons and are the hottest team in college football."

The MWC is currently in the middle of a four-year BCS evaluation process that will determine if the conference is strong enough statistically to gain an automatic berth into one of the big-boy bowls starting in 2012.

The BCS will weigh performance over a four-year period from 2008-11, measuring:

Where, on average, a league's highest-rated team finished in the BCS' regular-season rankings

The average number of teams in the league that finished in the rankings' top 25.

The average rank of all the league's members in the BCS' six computer ratings.

"We just have to continue to play well and eventually make it to where we're a member of it," CSU head coach Steve Fairchild said. "Obviously, it's unfair that we're excluded."

The results the Broncos, a team expected to open the season ranked as high as No. 2 in the polls, accrue on the field during the 2010 season will count for the MWC in the process, even though Boise State will not join the conference until 2011. Utah's impressive recent history, including the undefeated season and No. 2 final ranking in 2008, will count for the Pac-10.

"Adding Boise is good for our conference. You're talking about a top-10 type of football program," Fairchild said. "I think that strengthens us. Obviously, losing Utah hurts a little bit."

CU and Utah will probably be traveling partners in basketball and could end up playing one another in the final regular-season football game each year. It will be difficult, however, for the Buffs to replace BYU as Utah's true rival, or for CU fans to see Utah red the same way they see Nebraska red.

Even though college football is the top dog in intercollegiate athletics, some coaches were not comfortable with the way the sport was able to shake up and nearly shut down major conferences this month.

"It looked like it was going to be crazy with the conference realignments. What's sad about that is people were disguising it a lot of different ways, but ultimately it was chasing television football contract money," Fairchild said. "I get that finances are a part of college athletics, but when you do that at the expense of fans and heritage and rivalries and geography, I'm not sure that's good for the sport. ...

"If you would have said last December that this summer Texas was going to be considering going to the Pac-10, that to me was the surprising thing was how quickly it gained momentum and almost happened. I'm not sure that all of this was occurring for all the right reasons ... I hate to think of a day when Colorado State and Wyoming don't play."

The MWC's quest to be included in the BCS will require the continued success of Boise State, BYU and TCU. Perhaps of equal importance will be improvement from the Cowboys, Falcons and Rams.

"I think the strength of your league as a whole is a part of it, the teams that are winning are a part of it, and I think there is an element of respect," Air Force head coach Troy Calhoun said. "Even though they've tried to level this thing out and make it purely where it's quantified, I think that's a huge part of it. We have to continue to perform at a quality level. And there will be some push back. I think by and large what you're going to find is there is still a group that wants to keep it exclusive."

CU remains in that group. The Pac-10 champion will continue to gain automatic entrance into the Rose Bowl, if not the BCS title game.

The MWC knew all along it would have to make the BCS argument without the Buffs. It will be interesting to see if Dan Hawkins' old team can help Air Force, CSU and Co. into the club.

"We are going to knock down that BCS door one day," Thompson insists.

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