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Pac-10 expansion: The latest on the division split

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We're about 48 hours from commissioner Larry Scott and the athletic directors meeting in person for the first time to discuss splitting the league into divisions.

From what I'm hearing, at least two proposals are gaining traction among the ADs — one a geographic split, one a Zipper split (i.e., separating the natural rivals).

Before I get to the specifics, please note:

These are *working* options. There could be others that I haven't heard about, and these could change, perhaps as soon as Friday. Scott reiterated yesterday in NYC that the process might not be finalized until the presidents meet in October.

* The **geographic split** would place the *Arizona and California schools together* in the "South," with the Washington, Oregon and Mountain schools in the "North."

This certainly solves the "California issue" by keeping the four schools together and letting them play each other every year, as they've done for more than half a century. But would the NW schools agree to this format?

Apparently, there would be scheduling concessions that assure them of satisfactory exposure to the L.A. schools — although I'm not sure how the schedule can be manipulated enough, with just four inter-division games, to satisfy the demands of all six teams in the North.

And with a North-South split ... I wonder if the Pac-10 ends up stumbling down the same path as the Big 12, where all the power/money has gravitated to the "South" division because of state of Texas — the Big 12's recruiting equivalent of Southern California.

* Here's the current **Zipper proposal** under consideration, which splits the league in an East-West manner:

West

Washington
Oregon State
Stanford
UCLA
Arizona State
Utah

East

Washington State

Oregon
Cal
USC
Arizona
Colorado

Four thoughts:

1. Gotta think Steve Sarkisian — and everyone associated with Husky football — would be happy with this arrangement.
 2. In any Zipper split, you *must* separate Oregon and Washington. Otherwise, there will be an untenable NW power shift to their division ... and WSU just might fade into oblivion.
 3. I still wonder what was said between Larry Scott and Colorado AD Mike Bohn way back in early June, and whether the Buffs — if they cannot be paired with both L.A. schools — are pushing hard to be matched with USC.
 4. Interesting that the sister schools, Cal and UCLA would be separated. Makes you wonder if the ADs have discussed any scheduling concessions to assure the four California rivalries remain intact on an annual basis.
- Anyhow, those are the options being considered at the moment. No doubt, other proposals have been, or will be, discussed.

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Pac-10 Leader Envisions a Premier TV Channel

By **RICHARD SANDOMIR** and **KEN BELSON**

Larry Scott, the Pacific-10 commissioner, intends to start a television channel like the one that the Big Ten started in 2007.

That is no surprise. With two major universities in each of five Western states, and the addition of Colorado and Utah in 2011 or 2012, the conference can better brand itself (Pac-12) and create a profitable asset. But Scott wants to diverge somewhat from the strategy that the Big Ten followed when it carved out a schedule of football and basketball games for its network from the rights it sold to [ESPN](#) in a long-term extension.

"We're not that far along in our planning," Scott said.

But his goal is to have "more premier programming" than the "third-tier" games he said were on the Big Ten Network. The selection process for Big Ten football games greatly favors putting better games with greater ratings potential on ESPN, ESPN2 and ABC.

Elizabeth Conlisk, a spokeswoman for the Big Ten Network, declined to discuss Scott's characterization of the games the channel carries. But she said, "Every home game is televised on ESPN, ABC or the Big Ten Network."

Scott will have to negotiate the games that a Pac-10 network would have with the media company that acquires the conference's cable and broadcast rights. Currently, the conference has football contracts with ESPN/ABC and Fox Sports Net, or FSN, and a basketball agreement with FSN. Each football contract expires after the 2011 season and the FSN basketball deal after the 2011-12 season. The risk Scott will face is reducing how much ESPN, FSN or any other network suitor, like TBS or [Comcast](#), would pay in a traditional rights deal.

But, in an interview at The New York Times on Wednesday, Scott seemed to brush off those concerns. "Twelve teams gives us more content," he said.

Scott sees the sanctions levied by the [N.C.A.A.](#) on Southern California, and the university's self-imposed sanctions on its basketball team, as short-term concerns. But the TV deals, he said, are long term.

Starting a network would provide the conference's universities with a recruitment tool, primarily across its regional footprint, and also around the nation. If the proposed channel follows the lead of the Big Ten, it would be shown broadly by cable, satellite and telephone providers in the states where its colleges are located, and more narrowly, on levels like digital sports tiers, which cost more, in all the other states.

"With two teams in each market, we're custom-tailored around revenues," Scott said, referring to [U.C.L.A.](#) and U.S.C.; California and Stanford; Washington and Washington State; Oregon and [Oregon State](#); and Arizona and Arizona State.

Utah and Colorado don't exactly fit that model, but they would expand the conference's reach from the Pacific time zone into the Mountain time zone one hour earlier. When the two universities join the conference, the number of TV households in its footprint will grow from 16 million to 18.5 million.

Team or conference-owned networks can be highly profitable enterprises, as the YES Network has demonstrated. According to SNL Kagan, a media research firm, the Big Ten Network is already a big success. In 2009, it estimated that it had operating revenue of \$203.9 million and cash flow of \$35.9 million. This year, the figures are expected to rise to \$229.5 million in revenue and \$75.9 million in cash flow.

The combination of a profitable channel — which would have a partner like Fox, which is the Big Ten Network's partner — and a bigger rights deal from ESPN or FSN would alleviate financial pressures on the universities, Scott said.

Scott said athletic programs "feel tremendous pressure to pay for themselves because of a decrease in spending on higher education. Conferences are expected to generate more money. If they don't, programs will have to be cut."

A network can also showcase the sports that are rarely televised and the colleges' academic programs, as well as offer a way to reach markets in Latin America and Asia.