

# Pac-12 offers more to potential TV partners

## Scott held back some marquee events from Fox/ESPN deal

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Posted: 06/04/2011 11:39:10 PM MDT

SEATTLE -- One month after announcing a historic and groundbreaking media rights deal with ESPN and Fox, Pac-12 Conference commissioner Larry Scott says he is happy with the progress being made toward developing the Pac-12 Network but dozens of key decisions and thousands of hours of work remain before the curtain is raised in August 2012.

Scott isn't ready to even estimate what the startup costs might be for Pac-12 Media Enterprises, which will also encompass digital media platforms. He acknowledges they will be significant, but he also believes the rewards will be worth the investment and then some.

He said interest from possible partners in the network has exploded in the past month because of what the league was able to withhold from Fox and ESPN in the 12-year deal estimated to be worth \$3 billion announced last month.

Unlike most other startup sports networks in recent years, including the Big Ten Network and the Mountain West network The Mtn., the Pac-12 will have dozens of games of premium product -- football and men's and women's basketball games -- to air on its own right from the start.

"I think our plans became very real because they saw what we had held back," Scott said.

Scott met with Pac-12 athletic directors, senior women's administrators and faculty athletic representatives in hotel conference rooms in downtown Seattle on Friday and Saturday at the spring meetings here and spent considerable time discussing plans for the network. He is scheduled to meet with the league's presidents and chancellors today on the final day of the meetings.

It definitely hasn't been a one-sided conversation.

Scott is surrounded by a plethora of seasoned men and women with experience in all aspects of college sports, including a few who have been down this road before. In some ways, others in the room such as deputy commissioner Kevin Weiberg, Utah athletic director Chris Hill and Stanford athletic director Bob Bowlsby are educating Scott and his team on what to do and what not to do.

"It's hugely valuable," Scott said. "We are able to learn from those that went before us and ask the question, if you were going to do it over again, what would you do differently."

Bowlsby the Stanford AD, previously spent 15 years leading the Iowa athletic department and near the end of his time there he was heavily involved in Big Ten preparations to build a network. He left Iowa for Stanford before the official roll out of the network.

"I would say the one thing I took away from it is you really had to be forthright on an institution by institution basis putting all your cards on the table and going into it one for all and all for one because I think that's how you build the strongest entity and the strongest relationship," Bowlsby said. "I think we've taken some good steps in that regard."

Scott has already capitalized on asking for advice early in the process. It led to him reserving the rights to premium games in premium sports in his media negotiations this spring.

Scott said he has studied the NFL Network, the Yes Network for the New York Yankees, the Major League Baseball Network on top of seeking the advice of people such as Weiberg, the former Big 12 Conference commissioner who left that job to help the Big Ten get its network off the ground.

"They're not easy to do," Weiberg said. "It is complicated to start a new network and to launch it. I think the most complicated part is getting the kind of distribution you really need to make it successful. When you do these kind of things,

you want your fan base to be able to see it. That's kind of obvious. That part can be complicated because you have to negotiate agreements, either through a partner or on your own, with cable companies, satellite companies."

Hill is very familiar with that problem. As AD at Utah the past 25 years, he was involved in the planning and development of The Mtn., a network that still struggles to this day to gain traction and respect beyond its core fanbase and footprint.

"The biggest difference I think is going to be the passion that there is in this league for everybody to get their games," Hill said. "So the one thing I could say is start with reasonable expectations and don't promise the world and then deliver more."

"That's what will happen. I'm very confident in that because of the passion. Everyone is going to want to see those games. That wasn't the case in the Mountain West. There were some places in the Mountain West that didn't have the passion in their market to demand it."

The next major step for the Pac-12 network is selecting one or more partners to help build it. The pool of candidates includes existing television networks such as Fox Sports, private investors and cable and satellite distributors or a combination of two or more to fund, operate and distribute the network.

"It could be one, it could be multiple," Weiberg said. "Those are kind of things we're trying to sort through now."

The league's goals for the network are providing a platform for significant exposure for Olympic sports, delivering on a promise to televise every football and basketball game and having an ability to promote the universities more broadly.

The network ought to add a sizable amount of money -- albeit down the line -- to that \$3 billion deal the league just announced, too.

Weiberg estimated the network could eventually be a \$1 billion asset for the conference. He said it could be producing revenue flowing back to members within five years and will be showing programming of an academic or music and arts emphasis in addition to sports.

One part of this weekend's meetings focused on how the conference could include non-sports programming as the Big Ten has done but better.

Scott and Weiberg said they want the widest possible distribution within the six-state Pac-12 footprint and they are more flexible in where and how the network is carried outside the region. They still want a Colorado, USC, or Washington fan living in New York or Florida to be able to have access, but they might have to pay more for it.

Weiberg said one of the shortcomings in the introduction of the Big Ten network was having only seven or eight months to get executive staff on board and even less time for the rest of the staff. He said the Pac-12 will benefit from having more than a year.

Perhaps the biggest lesson learned from others is biting the bullet and spending more initially to make sure it appeals to customers.

"I think you have to start it off really understanding there is an investment on the front end to make it high quality," Hill said. "So that when people see it, they don't see it as a secondary station. A simple example is in the Mountain West when they didn't have HD coming in. I'm not an HD snob, but at the same time, that makes a statement. If you look at one station versus the other, it makes a statement."

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