Missouri could be considered if Big Ten expands

By MIKE DeARMOND

Separate statements issued less than one hour apart on Tuesday expressed a will by the Big Ten Conference to expand its membership and a way that Missouri could be considered in that expansion.

Shortly after 2 p.m. Tuesday, Missouri chancellor Brady Deaton issued this response to a post on The Star’s Campus Corner blog about the school’s openness to listen to any overture to join the Big Ten:

"The University of Missouri has not been contacted by the Big Ten. Should there be an official inquiry or invitation, we would evaluate it based upon what would be in the best interest of MU athletically and academically."

At 3 p.m., the Big Ten issued a statement on its Web site that the Big Ten Council of Presidents/Chancellors had discussed expansion at the group’s winter meetings on Dec. 6 in Park Ridge, Ill., and that:

"The COP/C has asked the conference office to obtain, to the extent possible, information necessary to construct preliminary options and recommendations without engaging in formal discussions with leadership of other institutions.

"If and when such discussions become necessary the COP/C has instructed Commissioner James E. Delany to inform the Chair of the COP/C, Michigan State University President Lou Anna K. Simon, and then to notify the commissioner of the affected conference(s).

"Only after these notices have occurred will the Big Ten engage in formal expansion discussions with other institutions. This process will allow the Big Ten to evaluate options, while respecting peer conferences and their member institutions."

The Big Ten statement said the presidents/chancellors group expected no action "in the near term."

Further, the statement said there would be no interim comments from the Big Ten or its presidents and chancellors.

Missouri officials have expressed dissatisfaction with the Big 12 Conference bowl selection process, which they feel has undercut the accomplishments of the MU football team in each of the last three seasons.

On Monday, Ohio State president E. Gordon Gee told The Columbus Dispatch that he sees a need to add a 12th team to the current 11-team Big Ten.

"We have to be thoroughly modern and realize the world has moved on, and having a playoff for the Big Ten championship makes sense," Gee said. "I'm not planting a stake in the ground on that issue, but it's something we now need to tackle."

Missouri has historically been considered a candidate for moving to the Big Ten, with proponents seeing the school as a good fit academically and athletically.

For years, the contention has been that the Big Ten coveted the inclusion of Notre Dame, even while that school has continued as a profitable and successful football independent.

Other schools mentioned as possible candidates for the Big Ten have been Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Nebraska.
The Big Ten said Tuesday that "the timing is right" to look at expanding the conference to 12 schools, a move that would open the possibility of a football championship game, which has become a cash cow for other leagues.

The Big Ten did not mention any potential targets for its "thorough evaluation of options" for expansion, but the announcement comes at a time full of grumbling online that Missouri should try to join the Big Ten in the wake of perceived slights by the Big 12.

But whether MU is a desirable fit for the Big Ten or vice versa is unclear.

Missouri athletics director Mike Alden said Tuesday via e-mail that "there isn't really any story here for us" and noted Mizzou hasn't heard from other conferences.

Alden did not specify whether MU would be interested in joining the Big Ten. The conference said it would not engage "formal discussions with leaders of other institutions during the 12 to 18 months it will study the matter."

Speaking on behalf of chancellor Brady Deaton, MU spokesperson Mary Jo Banken said, "Should there be an official inquiry or invitation, we would evaluate it based on what is in the best interest of MU, athletically and academically."

Longtime MU donor and former university curator Donald Walsworth said the only reason he could see joining the Big Ten is because of its television contract. But Walsworth doesn't believe that's compelling enough.

"I think Missouri is where it should be," he said. "Personally, I can't see it being an advantage to us. ... I think our fans would just be livid."
Current curator David Wasinger, who is based in St. Louis, said he didn't know enough to "have any feeling on the subject yet." But he said it did not come up in last week's regular meeting. Neither did any discussion of discontent with the Big 12.

He did not expect any movement to be driven by the board.

"We don't have the time or knowledge or experience to dig into that, so we defer to Mike Alden and his team to a large extent," Wasinger said, adding that there was no point to a "knee-jerk reaction."

MU fans have been upset that the Tigers were passed over by the Insight Bowl this year in favor of Iowa State. The bowl had the sixth choice among Big 12 teams and went with the 6-6 Cyclones instead of the 8-4 Tigers, who were picked by the Texas Bowl, which has the last pick of Big 12 teams. In the previous two seasons, Kansas and Nebraska, teams MU beat during the season, ended up in better bowls.

In the Big Ten, some are suggesting, that wouldn't have happened. But while the Big Ten does not allow its four top non-BCS bowl affiliates to take a team that has two fewer wins or two more losses than another eligible team, it makes no such concession beyond that, spokesperson Scott Chipman said in a recent e-mail.

Although the Big Ten statement didn't mention football specifically, the lure of a conference championship game is a strong one. Among the BCS conferences, only the Pacific 10 and Big Ten don't have a title game; the Big 12, Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference do.

Wisconsin athletics director Barry Alvarez said recently that the Big Ten is "irrelevant" late in the football season because the conference isn't playing while others are.

He's not alone on this.

"I look forward to the day when we add a team and we split the divisions and we play for a championship on national TV on a Saturday night in December," Minnesota coach Tim Brewster said at the preseason Big Ten media day. "Playing
into December, adding a team and playing a championship game, in my mind, would be a very positive thing for our conference."

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany is required to inform the conference’s council of presidents and chancellors before pursuing direct talks with any school. The Big Ten does not intend to comment on the process.

"We have a great conference, but it is always good to evaluate ways to make the conference even better," Illinois athletics director Ron Guenther said in a statement. "Any expansion of the conference would obviously have to be a good fit academically, geographically and financially."

The Big Ten last expanded in 1990 by adding Penn State as the 11th member, a move the conference called "an unqualified success." The council discussed expansion in 1993, 1998 and 2003.

The last big shift in major conferences came with the ACC's expansion in 2003 by luring Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College from the Big East, which in turn added Louisville, Cincinnati and South Florida for football.

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Big Ten evaluating expansion to 12 teams

By RICK GANO (AP)

CHICAGO — The Big Ten might be getting bigger.

The league said Tuesday it will explore options over the next 12 to 18 months for expansion. Big Ten presidents and chancellors decided this month that the timing is right to study adding a 12th school.

The Big Ten also looked at expansion in 1993, 1998 and 2003. Penn State was the last team to join in 1990, and Notre Dame rejected an offer in 1999.

The league, whose offices are in suburban Chicago, said no action on expansion is expected soon. It said it hopes to gather information before engaging in formal discussions with any schools.

The conference actually has 11 football teams, despite its name.

"About every five years the Big Ten Conference explores the possibility of expansion," Illinois athletic Ron Guenther said in an e-mail to the AP. "Any expansion of the conference would obviously have to be a good fit academically, geographically and financially. If the Big Ten does make a change, I hope it will be as successful as the addition of Penn State."

Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez last week told the university's board that he thinks the conference is serious about adding a 12th team, though Delany as recently as March called expansion a "back-burner" issue.

When Penn State came aboard, it was the first addition to the conference since Michigan State in 1949.

"With the changing landscape of intercollegiate athletics, now is a good time for the Big Ten to review its current structure and evaluate the potential for expansion," Michigan State athletic director Mark Hollis said. He called the addition of the Nittany Lions a "home run."

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said he's supportive of the expansion study. The Buckeyes have won five straight Big Ten football titles.

"If you look at the college landscape across the country, look at television contracts that are coming up over the next 5-8 years, this is probably the right time for us to see if there is there
any value in trying to add a team or teams," Smith said, without specifying schools that could be candidates.

Notre Dame, with its campus in South Bend, Ind., and a football independent with a lucrative and exclusive TV contract, rejected an offer 10 years ago. Most of the school's other athletic teams compete in the Big East.

Earlier this year, Penn State coach Joe Paterno said he'd like to see Rutgers, Pittsburgh or Syracuse join the league. He was not in favor of extending another offer to Notre Dame.

"There's some pressure, I would suppose, to maybe go back to Notre Dame and ask again, which I would not be happy with," Paterno said then. "I think they've had their chance."

Notre Dame officials did not immediately return a phone message left in the athletic director's office Tuesday.

Paterno said a 12th team could ease scheduling difficulties and clear the way for a lucrative conference championship football game with maximum end-of-the-season exposure — like the ones now held by the SEC and the Big 12.

"It would be a side benefit. It would not be a driver. If you look at all those contests, obviously the benefits are great," Smith said.

"The money's not as big as what most people think. Because you share that in your conference and you pay the expenses associated with that game. So it's not huge. But the publicity, the exposure, all those things, the experience for your kids, the experience for your fans, it's pretty inspiring."

If there is a strong candidate for expansion, Commissioner Jim Delany will report to Michigan State president Lou Anna K. Simon, the chairperson of the league's council of presidents and chancellors.

"This process will allow the Big Ten to evaluate options, while respecting peer conferences and their member institutions," the Big Ten said, adding the league would not comment until the council receives Delany's recommendations and determines whether to proceed.

University of Missouri spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said the school hasn't been contacted by the Big Ten.

"Should there be an official inquiry or invitation, we would evaluate it based on what is in the best interest of MU, athletically and academically," she said in an e-mail.

Don Walsworth, a major donor to Missouri's sports programs who was a member of the board that governs the university until earlier this year, said that, aside from a Big Ten television contract that allows more revenue sharing than the Big 12 deal, it makes little sense for Missouri to jump conferences.

The school's position in the geographic middle of the conference allows easy, relatively inexpensive travel, Walsworth said. Leaving behind rivals such as Kansas and big-time opponents like Texas would upset fans.
"I think that they would be a little bit miffed if we had to start those traditions over again," Walsworth said. "I like to play Oklahoma, I like to play Texas."

The closest thing Missouri has to a Big Ten rival is Illinois, which the Tigers play every year in football and basketball.

But the schools have said their annual football game in St. Louis will end after 2010, and many fans from both schools — Walsworth among them — say the rivalry doesn't amount to much.

Associated Press Writer David Mercer in Champaign, Ill., and AP Sports Writer Rusty Miller in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

On the Net:

- Big Ten: http://www.bigten.org
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Two Columbia tutoring programs see growth in services

By Lindsay Moser
December 15, 2009 | 1:25 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — **MU junior Elliot Ewert has been involved with Jumpstart, a Columbia tutoring program, for 1½ years, and enjoyed the program so much he decided to change his major from journalism to early childhood education.**

“(The program) is very attentive to the needs of children and really integrates well with the public school curriculum and classroom,” he said.

Ewert’s time is among the 38,000 hours tutors from Jumpstart and another tutoring program, A Way With Words and Numbers, are spending this year with public school children and community programs such as Nora Stewart Memorial Nursery School and the Boys and Girls Club.

The $785,000 used to run the programs comes from federal and local sources. The programs are typically free to the district, although this year four schools teamed to get an $18,000 grant to help pay for tutors there. Tutors are either unpaid volunteers, or volunteer as part of a service-learning program or are paid as work-study students.

The two programs combine their statistics because they work closely together and are similar in what they do. The hours and cost are a projection for the 2009-2010 school year based on information from previous years and knowing what hours the tutors work each week.

Overall, these numbers have steadily increased over the past three years as both programs have seen growth in the number of student volunteers and schools wanting to include the programs.
"With funding being a constraint, our goal each year is to grow inch by inch to serve more and more children," said Chrissie Bennett, Jumpstart site manager of the Columbia branch.

Part of a national program, Jumpstart provides tutoring services to low-income, at-risk preschool children at 10 Columbia schools. Tutors are students from MU and Columbia College whose main focus is to teach the children language and literacy skills.

"This is a little bit different than a job where you go in and work at a desk all day," Bennett said. "This is actually impacting two to three live little human beings, and I think it can be really powerful for them to see that at the end of the year."

MU graduate student Jacquelyn Francisco, a tutor with A Way With Words and Numbers, said it has been rewarding to watch the children progress throughout the year.

"Just seeing that they're success is a result of what this program brings to this community means a lot," Francisco said.

A Way With Words and Numbers is a 13-year-old program that services children who struggle with reading and math skills. It is available at all elementary and middle schools in the district.

Director Rob McDaniels said the program is a great opportunity both for the children and the MU undergraduate and graduate students that serve as tutors.

"It's a really nice way that the University of Missouri and Columbia community are connected," he said. "It's one of those win-win situations because everybody benefits from this."
Families deserve Access to college

Program meeting needs of students.

By MARIANNE E. INMAN

It is disappointing that University of Missouri President Gary Forsee is leading an effort to dismantle Access Missouri, the successful need-based financial aid program that has opened the doors of Missouri's colleges and universities to tens of thousands of students from working and lower-income Missouri families.

Access Missouri was developed by a committee of public and private financial aid professionals — including those at the University of Missouri System — selected by their peers. The award amounts were developed and agreed to by the committee, the college and university presidents, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education, and then in 2007 by the members of the General Assembly. The program was thoroughly vetted, discussed, debated and ultimately supported by all parties.

The program is very fair, especially because all students attending public institutions have the benefit of a sizable taxpayer subsidy even before financial assistance resources are figured in. Recent data show this subsidy averages just less than $5,700 per student for all public institutions, just more than $7,300 per student at all four-year public colleges and universities, and $8,800 per student for the four institutions within the UM System. When state financial assistance awards and capital expenditures are included, a student attending one of the UM campuses could be the beneficiary of more than $11,000 in public funds — more than twice the maximum Access Missouri award for a student attending an independent institution. Clearly, it would be a tremendous burden to our already financially drained state to shift the approximately 15,000 Access Missouri recipients attending independent institutions to the public sector.

Students who receive an Access Missouri grant demonstrate strong financial need. Many of these students also qualify for federal aid, including the Pell Grant. According to the most recent data available, the average family income of an Access recipient who attends a four-year public institution in Missouri is $37,060, while students attending four-year independent institutions have an average family income that is even lower — $35,604. It is clear the Access program is meeting the needs of Missouri's lowest-income students.

Central Methodist University serves about 5,000 students in more than 100 communities around Missouri. Many of our students are adult learners and individuals who are embarking on a new career because of job loss. Access Missouri is the difference between staying in college and standing in the unemployment line.
Given the current global economic uncertainties and the desire of Missouri to ensure higher education remains accessible and affordable to working families and those with demonstrated financial need, altering this highly successful program would be a disservice to students and to Missouri's work force development initiatives.

Higher education must be a priority for Missouri. Redistributing need-based financial aid in times of economic challenge, however, is not only unequal but unfair to the students who are aspiring to a college degree.

Marianne E. Inman is president of Central Methodist University in Fayette.
Mo. Farmers With Best Land Face 2011 Tax Rise

Missouri farmers with the best agricultural land might be saddled with higher taxes starting 2011 while those with less desirable plots could see their duties cut, under a proposal to adjust the productive value of the state's farmland.

The Missouri State Tax Commission has agreed on new productive values on farmland, which are used to calculate property taxes and are determined by evaluating the land's potential agricultural earnings.

Missouri's farms are divided into eight grades based on land quality, with the best farms in Grade 1. The tax commission said Tuesday it proposes increasing the productive value of farms in the top four categories—generally cropland—reducing the values for the next three lower categories, and leaving the lowest category unchanged.

If the state Legislature approves the proposed changes, they will take effect Jan. 1, 2011.

The Missouri Farm Bureau has urged the tax commission not to increase the productive value of agricultural land, and says it will ask lawmakers to reject the proposed changes.

"Missouri farmers are carrying some of the highest debt load in the nation, and clearly they cannot be expected to shoulder a tax increase," Farm Bureau President Charles Kruse said Tuesday.

Under the proposed changes, the best properties with deep, ideal soils that are flat, easily worked and produce dependable crop yields, would see an increase in productive value from $985 per acre to $1,270.

Grade 5 farms would experience the biggest drop in productive value, from $195 per acre to $147. Such properties can be moderately steep with serious drainage problems and where the soil is not suited for continuous cultivation.

Therefore, the productive value of an acre of Grade 1 cropland would rise to $152.40 from the current $118.20, while an acre of Grade 5 land would have an assessed productive value of $17.63 instead of $23.40.

State Tax Commission Chairman Bruce Davis said the new values were calculated by an organization based at the University of Missouri-Columbia that had studied a 15-year cycle of farm income.
Agriculture Department Director Jon Hagler in November urged the three-member tax commission not to increase any land values and to cut them for pasture and timber land. In a letter to the commissioners, Hagler warned that increases could hamper the state's farmers and the overall economy.

An Agriculture Department spokeswoman did not immediately respond to an e-mail requesting comment.

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