Missouri to weigh options on conference membership
Friday, June 11, 2010; By ALAN SCHER ZAGIER ~ The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- A University of Missouri curator said Thursday that the school has not been invited to join the Big Ten Conference, an acknowledgment made as the school's conference fights for its survival.

Curator Warren Erdman said that Missouri had not been asked to join the Big Ten. Erdman noted that he had been out of state the past week but wasn't aware of any change in the situation. He said the curators did not discuss conference affiliation during a closed-door morning meeting.

The Board of Curators meeting, which continues today, comes amid reports that Nebraska will leave the Big 12 and announce its move to the Big Ten today. And the Pac-10 announced Thursday that Colorado, like Missouri and Nebraska a member of the Big 12 North division, is leaving to join the West Coast-based league.

The loss of those two schools -- and possibly more as the Pac-10 reportedly considers taking five of the six Big 12 South members -- could spell the end of the 14-year-old league.

That would leave Missouri joining Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas and Kansas State on the sidelines, scrambling to salvage a process that school leaders hoped would result in an upgrade rather than awaiting an invitation that may never come.

Such a scenario seemed unlikely as recently as several weeks ago, when Missouri supporters proudly touted the school's academic strength, geographic proximity and existing rivalry with Big Ten member Illinois as obvious draws.

"Anything could happen, but we're working hard to stay together," said Missouri chancellor Brady Deaton, who added that he had called Texas president William Powers to discuss the conference's future after learning of Colorado's exodus.
Judy Haggard, chairwoman of the Missouri governing board, suggested that Missouri's fate remains unclear.

"It's too soon to say," she said before the closed meeting. "We're going to be getting a lot of information these next two days."

Despite repeated references by school officials to a carefully crafted statement pledging loyalty to the Big 12, Missouri seemed more than ready to join an expanded Big Ten should an offer have been made.

Missouri now finds itself on the outside looking in, and Tigers fans are starting to worry.

"There's a lot of concern among alumni about what happens to Mizzou and how this works out," said Todd McCubbin, executive director of the Missouri Alumni Association.

Quinn Schortal, a 28-year old project engineer and a 2005 Missouri graduate, said he would welcome a move to the Big Ten.

"The way this is being reported now I'm afraid they're going to be left out in the cold," he said. "They might have burned their bridges [with the Big 12]."

Missouri curators were scheduled to meet in additional closed-door sessions Thursday and today. Haggard confirmed that the 10 curators, who are political appointees, plan to discuss conference affiliation at some point.

The Big Ten announced late last year it is considering adding at least one school, and possibly more, to add a league championship game in football and broaden the reach of its cable television network.

Commissioner Jim Delany has said the conference planned to wait until later this year or even 2011 before deciding whether to add more schools.

That timetable may have been accelerated, though, with Missouri and Nebraska reportedly facing an imminent deadline to affirm their commitment to the Big 12.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, who previously has suggested that a move to the Big Ten would benefit Missouri, on Thursday urged school leaders and fans to remain calm.

"This is not something we should be operating for an ultimatum or some really short timeframe," he said. "It's a big decision, and if the Big 10 wants to begin these discussions with the university then the university should listen."
The Buffaloes made their move first. Colorado announced on Thursday that it was heading to the Pac-10 Conference. As Nebraska's decision to depart the conference looms, the fate of Kansas, Missouri and K-State is still up in the air.

Colorado University accepted an invitation from the Pac-10 on Thursday.

"The University of Colorado is a perfect match, academically and athletically, with the Pac-10. Our achievements and aspirations match those of the universities in the conference and we look forward to a productive relationship," CU President Bruce Benson said in a statement.

Eyes are turning to the Huskers in Lincoln now, as the state's regents are set to meet Friday and included a briefing with chancellor Harvey Perlman and athletic director Tom Osborne on conference alignment. The regents then could vote to leave the Big 12 and head to the Big 10 conference.

University of Missouri president Gary Forsee told reporters that despite changes in the conference, Mizzou remains clear in its support of the Big 12.

"It's something that as I drove back and forth the last few days between Kansas City and Columbia," he said. "It's certainly being talked about, so certainly our curators aren't immune to that, and I'm sure it will be a topic over the course of our two days with some discussion. What's happened over the last six months certainly has stimulated a lot of discussion nationally about conference realignment and what may happen. All of that is speculation. Certainly one step was taken today, and whether that one step has any further steps remains to be seen.

Forsee said the University of Missouri has been a founding member of the Missouri Valley Conference, The Big 6, The Big 8, and The Big 12. He's confident the school will be able to weather another change in the conference configuration.

However, the latest moves worry Missouri fans, who thought their school would be the first to break rank with the Big 12 and head to the Big 10.
The changes leave Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas and Kansas State with a crumbling conference on their hands and possibly without membership in a Bowl Championship Series conference.

Kansas chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little had reached out to her counterparts at Nebraska and Missouri, urging him to keep the Big 12 Conference together.

Kansas Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback also found themselves involved in the Big 12 shuffle.

Roberts was overheard telling a Nebraska senator that Husker AD Tom Osborne doesn’t want to be the guy known for ruining the Big 12. Roberts says Congress will probably stick its nose into it because of anti-trust concerns.

"It has been such a good and successful conference certainly for us in Kansas, but also for everybody in the region," Sen. Brownback said. "Would just really urge our colleagues and Nebraska, let’s stay together and continue to build on this great legacy."

"If it ain't broke don't fix it," Roberts added.

Still, all indications are that Nebraska will announce on Friday that it's leaving the Big 12.

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Missouri official not compelled to pledge loyalty to Big 12

By MIKE DeARMOND

COLUMBIA | Gary Forsee, president of the University of Missouri system, stated forcefully late Thursday afternoon that he feels no need to pledge that Missouri will not leave the Big 12 Conference — even though MU does not have an offer to join the Big Ten.

“I don’t think we have to justify our loyalty,” Forsee said, citing Missouri had been a founding member of the Missouri Valley Conference and every permutation of the league into the Big 12. “Even though I know, I’ve understood, rumors about the need for some show of loyalty.”

In fact, after meetings of the Big 12 athletic directors and school chancellors and/or presidents in Kansas City last week, Kansas State, Kansas and Iowa State issued statements in support of the Big 12 — which was already showing signs of fracturing then.

“I don’t think we need to justify our history in that regard,” Forsee said.

Forsee stood amid a large crowd of reporters in a second-floor room at the Reynolds Alumni Center, where the MU Board of Curators was meeting. He said Thursday’s announcement that Big 12 member Colorado would be moving to the Pacific-10 Conference changed his mind about what had been a no-comment stand on college realignment.

“That has implications on the Big 12,” Forsee said. “So our curators are very interested in those developments, very interested in these facts as they appear. As you might imagine we won’t participate in feeding continued speculation of what else might happen around conference realignment or in the Big 12 for that matter.

“But rest assured that our Board of Curators, all our administrators, are on top of these issues.”

Then Forsee launched into what sounded like a sales pitch.

“We have an incredible institution,” Forsee said. “We have 60,000 fans that show up on average for our football games. We have programs that over the past decade have certainly risen to the top nationally in terms of their standing.
"We have over 30,000 students at this institution. So rest assured the University of Missouri is going to be a very significant factor nationally, no matter what happens."

Forsee’s statements punctuated what had been a tumultuous 36 hours in the continuing saga of whether Missouri will remain a member of the Big 12 or take what was once assumed would be an invitation to join the Big Ten.

An invitation that thus far, according to curator Warren K. Erdman of Kansas City, had not come as late as last week and that sources have confirmed to The Star has still not been delivered.

Missouri’s athletic affiliation thus remains as much in limbo as when, on Wednesday at Blue Springs, MU assistant basketball coach Matt Zimmerman walked off the course at the Adams Pointe Golf Club and asked: “What league are we in?”

No one was saying. No one is now. Perhaps because no one really knows.

Including Forsee, who during an earlier break Thursday — the first of two days of curators’ meetings — acknowledged the concern that is sweeping the state.

“It’s all that’s being talked about,” Forsee said. “So certainly our curators, and none of us are immune to that … it will be I’m sure a topic through our two days of some discussion.”

That was especially true on Thursday when news of Colorado’s move was confirmed.

“One step was taken today,” Forsee said. “Whether that one step has any further steps remains to be seen.”

Panic seemed the emotional measure of the mood of Missouri fans Wednesday with speculative radio and Internet reports that Missouri might not receive an invitation to apply to the Big Ten. By Thursday, that sentiment seemed to have settled into a greater acceptance of uncertainty. But the anxiety was still high.

MU chancellor Brady Deaton repeatedly stressed one point.

“Our work together right now is to do what we can to strengthen the Big 12,” Deaton said as he stood in an open doorway at the Reynolds Alumni Center. “It’s a pretty dynamic situation right now. We’re really trying to nail down what we can.”

Deaton was asked a spate of questions about what Erdman agreed was “the elephant in the room” at these meetings.

If both Colorado and Nebraska leave the Big 12, and a move is also made by Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State to join Colorado in leaving for the Pac-10, the demise of the Big 12 Conference would seem to be a foregone conclusion.
Asked about that directly, Deaton said: “Anything could happen. We’re working hard to hang together.”

Most of the curators — including Bo Fraser, David Bradley and David Wasinger — declined comment. And for much of the day it seemed business not only as usual but with a smile.

Many Missouri fans were not smiling.

“We don’t know whether we have an offer from the Big Ten,” said Wayne Jackson, a longtime member of the Kansas City Tiger Club who lives in Lee’s Summit. “I had just accepted as fact we would probably go to the Big Ten. But if there isn’t an offer?”

“Everybody’s very anxious,” said Julia Ferner, another MU fan, who lives in Leawood.
MU's loyalty to Big 12 is suspicious

By Bryan Burwell
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
06/11/2010

COLUMBIA, MO. — There was a time not that long ago when Gary Forsee surely believed the ground beneath him was bedrock solid. But now here was the University of Missouri president early Thursday evening surrounded by a swarm of minicams and microphones, and the earth was shifting beneath him.

The Big 12 Conference — Mizzou's athletic home in all its various forms for more than 100 years — was crumbling like a dilapidated house in an earthquake, and despite Forsee's reassuring words that all was well, the facts simply betrayed him. Earlier in the day, Colorado officially became the first member school to bolt out the door, bound for the expansion-obsessed Pac-10. Add that to the credible speculation that Nebraska's exit to the Big Ten was imminent, and the countless reports of varying degrees of credibility that kept coming in by the hour — sometimes by the minute — predicting the Big 12's total annihilation, and you had to wonder why this man was smiling.

"What's that song, 'We didn't start this fire?' " Forsee said with a wry grin to the media horde at Thursday's MU board of curators meeting. "But certainly if you follow any of the national speculation ... I don't know whether the one event we had today (Colorado's departure) triggers anything else. ... Our interest is to watch these events unfold and be very active in ensuring the Big 12 as we sit here today is very strong as we look forward."

But the most unsettling gossip of all was that Mizzou, once thought to be a lock to be one of the first teams to be plucked away from the Big 12, now looks like it could be one of the poor unfortunate souls being left standing on the corner when the last buses roar away from the curb.

A week ago, privately you have to believe that no one in Columbia was talking about "ensuring" anything about the Big 12's future other than that the Tigers wouldn't be a part of it. Justifiably, this school had every right to be looking to greener pastures, because historically the Big 12 has treated Missouri like an unwanted stepchild.

Now curiously, the dialogue has changed. "We can't say it any more strongly than we've already said it," said Forsee over and over again. "We are loyal members of this conference alignment. There shouldn't be any question about where we built our record, where we built our legacy,
where we built our fans, where we built everything including our rivalries. So to sit here today ... I don't think we need to justify our loyalty that has been in place for 104 years."

A few weeks ago, Forsee looked like he was in charge of one of the belles of the ball in the volatile world of this wildly unpredictable conference expansion-contraction party. Great school, wonderful facilities, nationally recognized sports teams with the sort of big TV markets of St. Louis and Kansas City that made MU look positively irresistible to the TV-market obsessed Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany and his Manifest Destiny plan to divide and conquer the college football landscape.

Now the official line out of Mizzou is loyalty to a conference that has routinely treated MU poorly. I couldn't help but wonder where this new, heartfelt "loyalty" was coming from. Did he suddenly develop amnesia and forget about all the bowl slights and second-class citizenship that this conference has dealt Missouri over the years?

So I have to wonder if MU's surprisingly fierce Big 12 "loyalty" might mean that it has nowhere else to go.

I talked to a very credible source very familiar with Mizzou's ever-changing situation who confirms that Missouri officials did indeed have serious conversations with Big Ten officials about a potential move to the rival conference. That source now believes Delany might have been casting a wide net to potential expansion candidates. So it raises a few important questions: Did MU officials overestimate Delany's flirtations as a sincere offer, or did Delany intentionally oversell and misrepresent the Big Ten's interest in Missouri to serve his own interests?

After watching the events of the past few days, I wonder if Forsee has the greatest poker face of all time and has managed to keep MU's expansion possibilities leak-proof, because no one — and I mean no one at all — is talking about what the school's ultimate athletic destination could be.

Big Ten? Big 12? SEC? The Island of Misfit Toys?

Who knows.

What I fear is that it's something entirely different.

I'm worried that Mizzou's poker face comes from the worst possible motivations of all. That's not an ace in Forsee's hand.

It's a lack of options.
Missouri's future with Big 12 appears murky

By Vahe Gregorian

COLUMBIA, MO. — The first wave of college athletics expansion — and reduction, in the case of the Big 12 — splashed ashore Thursday with Colorado leaving the Big 12 for the Pacific 10 and Nebraska's departure for the Big Ten appearing imminent.

But Missouri's future affiliation was just as murky at the end of the first day of its regularly scheduled board of curators meeting as it has been through the past few weeks of intensifying speculation.

The school's stance remained somewhere between stoic and poised even as the question remains whether it has had remarkable control of leaks or simply has nothing left in the pipeline.

Even amid a frenzy of contradictory reports emerging from almost anyone who owns a computer, Missouri president Gary Forsee noted that the only substantiated development was Colorado's move to the Pac-10 and that he didn't think it necessary to justify Missouri's loyalty to the conference because of its history there.

"The speculation now has one data point," Forsee said, later adding, "Rest assured that our board of curators, all of our administrators, are on top of these issues. We have an incredible institution.

"So rest assured the University of Missouri is going to be a very significant factor nationally no matter whatever happens."

That could include the demise of the Big 12 with the key South division schools Texas, Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State now objects of conjecture that they are bound in various pairings or as a group for either the Pac-10 or Southeastern Conference.

But even as Forsee extolled Missouri's 104-year history with various forms of the conference — from the Missouri Valley to the Big Six, Seven and Eight — chancellor Brady Deaton acknowledged, "Anything could happen. Until it's done, we're working hard to hang together and move forward."

While some already are writing the Big 12's obituary, Oklahoma athletics director Joe Castiglione said Wednesday that Oklahoma would seek to keep the Big 12 together.

A meeting Thursday of Texas and Texas A&M officials resulted in a source briefed on the meeting who
told The Associated Press that the situation was "still fluid" and that the Texas schools could stay in the Big 12.

That lingering hope could change instantly, though, if Missouri leaves for the Big Ten, which is believed to be considering Missouri and according to the Omaha World-Herald and Chicago Tribune already has invited Nebraska.

Lending credence to those reports, Nebraska has not issued any denial as it did immediately when a Kansas City radio station reported last month that it would be among schools asked to join. Nebraska's board of regents is expected to approve the move with a vote at its meeting today.

Missouri's board of curators, meanwhile, was mum on expansion Thursday, with curator Warren K. Erdman of Kansas City saying "I'm not talking" when stopped by a reporter and curator David Wasinger of St. Louis declining to comment. It's not known whether they were silent because they were being discreet or because there was nothing about the Big Ten to discuss.

While the Big Ten has said it was considering inviting institutions in stages, now would seem the time to ask Missouri if it plans to do so given the wobbly standing of the Big 12 and ample time to assess Missouri's fit since the Big Ten announced in December that it would study expansion.

If it hasn't or doesn't make an offer and the Big 12 vanishes, Missouri's next conference home would be a mystery. As one conference commissioner put it Thursday: "If Missouri doesn't come out and say they're in (the Big Ten) tomorrow, I think those guys are in big trouble."

At this stage, no news only will create more anxiety among Missouri fans even if it's simply because, as Deaton put it, "We're trying to have responsible discussions with our curators."

Asked if he thought there would be any more clarity by Friday afternoon, Deaton said, "Gosh, that would be something I'd be afraid to say given what we're hearing on a moment to moment basis."

And perhaps hard to say based on what Missouri is not hearing.
Amid uncertainty, officials embrace Missouri's Big 12 history

Big Ten source says MU is not a high-priority candidate

By Dave Matter

Friday, June 11, 2010

With Missouri's flagship university ensnared in uncertainty, its two most powerful figures delivered little clarity to the conference conundrum yesterday. Meeting with reporters at the Reynolds Alumni Center, where the UM Board of Curators is holding two days of meetings, University System President Gary Forsee and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton embraced the school's century-old relationship with its conference but revealed few clues to what lies ahead, even as the Big 12 Conference continues to crumble.

With Colorado gone to the Pac-10 Conference and Nebraska set to officially join the Big Ten Conference today, Deaton focused on preserving what's left of the Big 12, while Forsee rattled off MU's credentials like a carnival barker looking for customers.

"We have an incredible institution at the University of Missouri," Forsee said after the board finished its second closed executive session of the day. "We have 60,000 fans, on average, who show up to our football games. We have programs that over the past decade have certainly risen to the top nationally in terms of their standing. We have over 30,000 students in this institution. So, rest assured, the University of Missouri is going to be a very significant factor nationally no matter what happens."

But in what conference? Barring a last-minute peace agreement brokered by the league powers — in the form of a new television contract through the Fox networks — the Big 12 is wobbling on its last legs, despite Commissioner Dan Beebe's hopes of keeping the conference alive by "working tirelessly towards the long-term viability of the Big 12," as he stated in a statement released yesterday.

But as the game of conference musical chairs continues, Forsee was reluctant to discuss any possible scenarios while the music is still playing.

"Until we see what plays out over the next few months, or the next year for that matter, we just won't know," he said.
Both Forsee and Deaton declined to address any questions focused on the Big Ten and its expansion plans, even when asked point blank if Missouri has been invited to apply for admission into the conference. Earlier in the day, the chancellor’s office circulated an email to school officials reminding them to stay on message with the school’s long-held stance on conference realignment and Big 12 loyalty. Forsee and Deaton stuck to the script.

“We’ve said all along we’re making no comments on conference realignment,” Deaton said. “We’re trying to have responsible discussions with our curators on these matters right now and watching what happens out there as the world goes on.”

At this point, the Big Ten’s interest in Missouri is the biggest missing piece of the puzzle. A Big Ten source said Missouri has not been eliminated from the conference’s expansion plans but is not considered a high priority at this time. The source said Texas, from the Big 12, and Notre Dame, an independent in football, are clearly alongside each other on the Big Ten’s top tier of targets, followed by Nebraska, soon to become the Big Ten’s 12th member, and then Rutgers, a member of the Big East Conference. Missouri and Maryland, of the Atlantic Coast Conference, and perhaps other less publicized targets, could figure into the mix if the top choices decide against applying for admission or the league expands beyond 14 members.

Back in the Big 12, media reports have linked Oklahoma and Texas A&M to SEC expansion, while those two, plus Oklahoma State, Texas and Texas Tech, are still considered strong candidates to join the Pac-10.

That was the move Colorado made yesterday, ending an affiliation with a core of schools that became known as the Big Seven back in 1948 when the Buffaloes joined the league from the Mountain States Conference. Despite what might be the Big 12’s most feeble combination of football and men’s basketball programs — plus an athletic department struggling with financial troubles — Colorado pulled off the first move of what could be many across the country. The Buffs are expected to begin competition in the Pac-10 in 2012.

“We look at it as a real class conference,” CU president Bruce D. Benson told the Boulder Daily Camera. “You’re judged by who you associate with and we want to be associated with the Pac-10 because it’s such a great conference. Now that is saying nothing against the Big 12.”

With the news of Colorado’s exit, Deaton said his first priority was discussing the state of the Big 12 with other members of the league’s board of directors, starting with Texas President Bill Powers.

“We have to assess where that leaves us, what we’ll we do as a conference in terms of other schools or whatever,” he said.

With MU’s future uncertain, Deaton and Forsee shared a tone of conference loyalty, pitching an even stronger case in favor of the Big 12 than Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden expressed during last week’s Big 12 athletic directors meetings in Kansas City. While some media outlets in Oklahoma and Texas have portrayed MU as sparking the league’s combustion
by flirting with the Big Ten, Forsee pointed to MU’s long history with the conference through all its stages.

“We can’t say it any more strongly than we continue to say it: We have been loyal members of this conference alignment, going back to the Missouri Valley, the configuration of the Big Six, the Big Eight, the Big 12,” he said. “So, there shouldn’t be any question about where we have built our record, where we’ve built our legacy, where we’ve built our fans, where we’ve built everything, including the great rivalries.

“I don’t think we have to justify our loyalty. That’s been in place for 104 years.”

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.
Big 12 destruction begins with Colorado

Missouri future unknown after recent events.

By Dave Matter

Published June 10, 2010 at 1:36 p.m.
Updated June 10, 2010 at 1:36 p.m.

The first Big 12 team has defected, and over the next two days, the fate of the conference could be decided around various meeting tables.

The Pac-10 announced today that Colorado has accepted an invitation to join its conference.

The University of Missouri System Board of Curators had a closed executive session this morning at Reynolds Alumni Center, followed by another scheduled for this afternoon and another tomorrow.

Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton learned of Colorado’s move to the Pac-10 just as he walked into the Reynolds Alumni Center for lunch around 11:30 a.m.

“They’re a member of the Big 12, so the first thing I did was picked up the phone and called Bill Powers because right now he’s in the chair role of the Big 12,” Deaton said, referring to the president of Texas, who serves as the chairman for the Big 12 board of directors. “I wanted to chat with him about the implications of that.”

Deaton would not comment on how Colorado’s departure could affect the rest of the Big 12.

“Anything could happen,” he said. “Until it’s done, we’re working hard to hang together and move forward.”

Before handlers pulled him away from a gathering of reporters, Deaton said he expected the curators to discuss Missouri’s conference affiliation issue during its meetings today and tomorrow but deferred to the curators and UM President Gary Forsee to comment on those discussions.

In Lincoln, Neb., Nebraska’s Board of Regents will meet tomorrow, reportedly to vote on leaving the Big 12 for the Big Ten. And in Texas, representatives from Texas and Texas A&M
will gather to decide their future, whether they stay and salvage the Big 12 or head for safer waters in the Pac-10 or Southeastern Conference.

Multiple outlets reported last night that Nebraska’s regents agreed during a conference call yesterday to become the next member of the Big Ten and will announce the news sometime tomorrow. Nebraska, though, responded to the crush of reports with a statement saying its board discussed tomorrow’s agenda but has not voted on changing leagues.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the Pac-10 is prepared to extend invitations to Big 12 members Colorado, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M and Texas Tech — not Baylor, as was previously reported elsewhere. SI.com added another curveball to the mix last night, reporting that Texas A&M and the SEC approached each other about possible expansion months ago.

A mass exodus of members would surely cripple the Big 12, leaving as many as five schools — Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and, perhaps, Missouri — looking for a new conference.

The lure of the Big Ten’s lucrative television agreement was surely enticing enough for MU to consider fleeing the Big 12. If the league dissolves, though, a more competitive TV proposal than the current Big 12 deal might be left on the table.

A Big 12 source said two top executives from Fox made what was described as an impressive presentation to the Big 12 presidents in Kansas City last week during the final day of conference meetings, pitching a multi-network TV deal that would involve Fox and cable stations Fox Sports Net and FX.

The deal was described as competitive with the SEC’s current deal with ESPN, with a nine-figure offer and a lifespan of more than 10 years.

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.
Missouri's conference future is uncertain; fans remain positive

Thursday, June 10, 2010 | 9:02 p.m. CDT
BY Matthew Schur

COLUMBIA — MU has been caught up in the whirlwind of conference realignment. And with Colorado's exit from the Big 12 to the Pac 10, MU's uncertainty could have fans panicked.

But it doesn't.

The University of Missouri System Board of Curators met Thursday for the first of two days where the issue of conference realignment will be discussed among other issues.

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton stuck to the stance he's taken in the last several weeks -- that anything could happen, but for right now Missouri's a proud member of the Big 12.

Kyle Bowers, the president of the Tiger Quarterback Club, a booster club for the football team, is not worried about MU's future.

"I have confidence that they will make the right decision for the university," Bowers said.

Part of his confidence is due to athletic director Mike Alden's ability.

"I have a lot of faith in Alden," Bowers said. "Alden is very knowledgeable of the conference, and MU doesn't need to worry about being left out of a power conference."

His biggest worry rests not with MU, but with Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and Baylor, which he said he feels might be left out of a conference.

Chuck Everitt, the president-elect of the Tiger Quarterback Club, reiterated Bowers's lack of concern.

"I’m not worried at all about MU," Everitt said. "Mizzou has the best reputation in its history. The sports are the best they've ever been."

Everitt believes MU is too valuable to be left out, and though he is not worried, he would like to see something happen.

"I wish they'd get it over with, one way or the other."
Despite his frustration, Everitt's overall outlook remains positive.

"We'll come out just fine," he said. "They work their butts to make this the best university and I'm damn proud of that."

James Tarr is an associate professor in the department of learning, teaching & curriculum and an executive committee member of the faculty council.

On Thursday, Tarr ate lunch with some members of the board of curators but noted that not a word was said about the conference realignment.

Tarr described the impact of this decision by saying that this matter transcended sports. Among other things, Tarr noted the importance of the Tigers remaining in a large conference so they can have the appeal of attracting out-of-state students.

"Missouri high school graduate numbers will be down in the next couple of years, creating a greater need for out-of-state students for Mizzou," Tarr said.

Professor and anthropology department chairman R. Lee Lyman had a different take on the matter. When asked what he made of the situation, Lyman responded, "Life goes on."

"It's a fascinating statement on the human condition," Lyman said. "I understand that athletics are extremely important, but as an anthropology professor I find it appalling that athletics satisfy our attention more than education."

Around campus, the sentiment is that everything will be fine.

Incoming freshman Patrick Healey said he would have gone to MU even if the school were left without a conference or was a member of a smaller conference.

"I like the school," he said. "That's what I came here for.

Another incoming freshman, Stephen Ball, said he's not worried about what will happen. "It wouldn't have affected my decision at all."

Others, such as MU student Ann Kuttenkuler, said she didn't feel one way or the other about the realignment.

Overall, it seems as if everyone is OK with what might happen. They're just itching for a resolution — whatever it may be.

Missourian reporters Clay McGlaughlin and Nikki Tekeei contributed to this report
Forsee, Deaton address uncertainty

By Dave Matter

Posted June 10, 2010 at 6:30 p.m.

The first day of the UM System Board of Curators has wrapped up at Reynolds Alumni Center with no semblance of clarity on Missouri's future. Shortly before the board broke from its afternoon closed session, Chancellor Brady Deaton and System President Gary Forsee addressed reporters.

"Rest assured," Forsee said, "our Board of Curators, all of our administrators are on top of these issues."

Deaton said the board has been monitoring all the conference alignment developments but insisted his focus is preserving the Big 12.

"We feel very strong sitting on top of it and looking at all options for the conference as a whole," he said. "Missouri is very proud of what we've done with the Big 12. We've said that all along. And we continue to be. We're working hard to preserve that and strengthen it and move forward. That's where we are right now."

Asked point blank if Missouri has received an offer from the Big Ten, Deaton offered little.

"We've said all along we're making no comments on conference realignment," he said. "We're trying to have responsible discussions with our curators on these matters right now and watching what happens out there as the world goes on."

Asked if he was troubled by the way Missouri has been characterized as starting the conference game of musical chairs, Deaton changed his tone to defensive.
"You can sort of judge from the beginning to the end what’s been perceived there," he said. "Missouri early on took the position we’re proud members of the Big 12 and we’re not going to speculate about conference realignments. And we appreciate the interest people have shown in the university. That’s all we’ve ever said from the beginning to right now."

Then why all the angry finger pointing coming from some media outlets in the Big 12 South?

"Gosh, I would never begin to try and explain that," Deaton said. "I was going to call Bill and ask him."

Bill, as in Bill Powers, the president of Texas and chairman of the Big 12 board of directors. Deaton said he immediately called Powers when news broke that Colorado had officially left the Big 12 for the Pac-10, but as of 5:30 p.m., the two had not spoken.

Forsee reiterated Deaton’s urgency on preserving the Big 12 and declined to address any questions touching on alignment speculation or offers or invitations from other conferences.

"We can't say it any more strongly and we continue to say it: We have been loyal members of this conference alignment, going back to the Missouri Valley, the configuration of the Big Six, the Big Eight, the Big 12," Forsee said. "There shouldn't be any question about where we have built our record, where we've built our legacy, where we've built everything, including the rivalries. To see sit here today and say what's going to happen to the Big 12, I don't think we have to justify our loyalty. That's been in place for 104 years."
Don't you mean 11?

By Dave Matter

Posted June 10, 2010 at 1:05 p.m.

Earlier on Thursday, Missouri circulated an email to university officials reminding them to stay on target with the school's long-held stance on conference realignment. The email, sent by assistant to the chancellor for university affairs Chris Koukola and obtained by the Tribune, read:

"Administrators across the campus are being contacted by members of the media related to conference realignment and related topics. I want to reconfirm the MU statement:

"The University is a proud member of the Big 12 Conference. We will not comment on speculation related to conference realignment. We are grateful for all the interest in and support for the university.

"This is the only comment MU is making to reporters."

So far, Chancellor Brady Deaton has followed his own assistant's advice, ending a brief meeting with reporters with the MU mantra: "We are proud members of the Big 12 Conference."
The Big 12 Conference has a pulse, for now

By BLAIRE KERKHOFF

NO MENTION

The Big 12 took a hit but maintained a faint heartbeat at the end of Thursday, and that was reason enough to produce a sigh of relief from one of the conference’s architects.

“We got through the day and lost one. Maybe we’ll be OK,” said Jon Wefald, a former Kansas State president and a Big 12 founding father.

Who knows what this day will be like to get through?

Nebraska, which all week has been expected to announce a move to the Big Ten this afternoon and spark a chain reaction of conference realignment, was upstaged Thursday morning by Colorado and its announcement that it was joining the Pac-10.

Suddenly it appeared the stampede was on a day early. Surely, in the wake of Colorado’s surprise move, the dominoes would not wait for Nebraska now to start falling. The speculation ran rampant with Big 12 schools in the center of the storm.

But by the evening there was no other movement, at least none announced.

In Austin, Texas, a meeting of athletic officials from Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor broke up without no decisions made on their future. A source told an Associated Press reporter there that the situation was “still fluid.”

There was sentiment at the meeting for the Texas schools to remain in the Big 12, according to other reports.

Three of the schools — Texas, Texas A&M and Texas Tech — along with Oklahoma and Oklahoma State have been widely expected to soon join the Pac-10 and help form a lucrative 16-team superconference. But Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said Thursday that his conference may not add another member — at least not yet.

“There are no assurances. ... No invitations have been issued” beyond Colorado’s, Scott said.
Separate reports Thursday said Oklahoma and Texas A&M had been contacted by the Southeastern Conference. And Missouri, considered for months as a front-runner to join the Big Ten, remained in limbo, with no offer on the table yet.

Some hopeful news came out of Manhattan, with a source close to the K-State athletic department saying the Pac-10 could be interested in both Kansas and Kansas State in the scenario that it misses out on some of the teams it is reportedly courting.

The Big East and Mountain West conferences could also be possibilities, but both are currently considered long shots, two sources close to the department said.

KU athletic director Lew Perkins, who announced Thursday that he would retire in September 2011, said he would make conference alignment his top priority in his remaining time on the job, and he looms as a pivotal figure if the Big 12 as we know it collapses.

Perkins is one of the most well-connected administrators in college sports and came to Kansas in 2003 from Connecticut, where he served for more than a decade. His Big East associations could serve his program well, along with others looking for long-term security in a Bowl Championship Series automatic-qualifier conference.

Only the champions of six of major college football's 11 conferences — currently the Big 12, Big East, Atlantic Coast, Southeastern, Big Ten and Pac-10 — are guaranteed berths in the BCS, which consists of the highest-paying bowl games and decides the national championship.

"My greatest priority is working on conference alignment issues," Perkins said in a statement.

The next move appears to belong to Nebraska today. The school's Board of Regents is scheduled to meet in Lincoln, Neb., and the topic of conference alignment has been added to its schedule. Chancellor Harvey Perlman and athletic director Tom Osborne will speak to the board.

If the Cornhuskers join the Big Ten, it may open the floodgates of departure of Big 12 schools to the Pac-10. Texas has indicated that having Nebraska in the conference is important to the Big 12's future.

The move by Colorado, whose addition in 1947 turned the Big Six into the Big Seven, is the first departure by a Big 12 school in its 14-year competitive history.

"You're judged by who you associate with, and we want to be associated with the Pac-10 because it's such a great conference," Colorado president Bruce D. Benson said. "Now, that is saying nothing against the Big 12."

Colorado could be subject to the Big 12's buyout penalty. The league's bylaws require departing teams to surrender 50 percent of Big 12 revenue distributions for two years. For the Buffaloes, that's about $9 million.
But it's unclear what would happen if the conference dissolved — or became re-established with other members.

That possibility raised another question: Would a reconstituted Big 12 — say, the five schools that did not land in other conferences and candidates from other leagues — maintain the league's BCS automatic-qualifier status?

BCS executive director Bill Hancock was unavailable for comment on Thursday.

No matter what happens, Wefald wants to see the conference he helped create continue.

“If there wasn’t a place for some schools, it would be a calamity,” Wefald said. “I hope sincerely that it works out well for all of the schools, and it will if the Big 12 stays together.”
New alliances, league affiliation ready to reshape college sports

NO MU MENTION

By Marlen Garcia, USA TODAY

The first ripple in a money-driven, potentially seismic shift in college sports came Thursday when the Pacific-10 Conference announced the University of Colorado will become its 11th member, beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

The Big Ten Conference, which has had 11 members since Penn State joined in 1990, could be next with a major move. Regents at the University of Nebraska— which like Colorado has been a member of the Big 12 — could announce as early as Friday that the school is joining the 114-year-old league.

The moves, aimed largely at increasing television revenue from the schools' football programs, are a signal that the landscape of college sports could be reshaped this summer by dramatic realignments that could jeopardize longstanding regional rivalries and raise a range of questions. Among them: Where will the University of Texas and Notre Dame— considered the crown jewels of college sports because of the huge revenue their programs generate — end up? Will the Big 12 Conference (which also includes Texas) survive? As Colorado and Nebraska depart the league, its viability is in doubt. Will a domino effect — driven partly by expansion plans of the Pac-10 and Big Ten — create chaos in any other leagues, such as the Big East?

Those with a stake in college sports have been waiting for such events to unfold since the Big Ten announced in December that it was studying expansion.

Conference expansion is largely about hooking up with brand-name football programs with heavy followings that are the basis for lucrative TV deals. There is little room for sentiment with millions of dollars on the line.

"This is now about the number of households; it's not about geographical location, traditional rivalries or any of the other traditional reasons when you think about conference alignment," said Karen Weaver, athletics director at Penn State-Abington who recently wrote a doctoral thesis on the launch of the highly successful Big Ten Network. "It's about who brings the most value to the table."
Said former Purdue football coach Joe Tiller: "Who are we kidding? It's all about the money. It's not necessarily what's good for the sport; it's all about the money."

Established in 2007, the Big Ten Network already is churning a profit, drawing envious looks from many other conferences. Big Ten schools equally split $72 million in network revenue for the fiscal year that ended in June 2009.

Other leagues see similar potential for a financial boon. By moving into Colorado, the Pac-10 hopes to corner the Denver market as it prepares to negotiate a new TV deal and examines launching its own network.

That league could add more teams — possibly up to five more members of the current Big 12 besides Colorado, a move that would kill the league that began play in 1996 as a merger of the Big Eight with four schools from the old Southwest Conference.

"There are still several different scenarios that could play out," Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott said in a teleconference.

Ideally for the Pac-10, those scenarios would include Texas.

"I think what they really want out of this is Texas and the Texas schools that go with it," said Barry Frank, executive vice president of IMG Media, which recently negotiated a deal between the Atlantic Coast Conference and ESPN.

From other Big 12 members to the Pac-10 and Big Ten, it seems everyone wants the Austin-based university. Texas is a football and financial behemoth with enormous clout; its program raked in $138.5 million in 2009. Texas' TV drawing power is so significant that its athletic department has floated the idea of starting its own TV network to cover Longhorns sports — and keeping all the money it makes.

If Texas were to bolt the Big 12 in light of the defections by Colorado and Nebraska, it could take Texas A&M and Texas Tech with it. Those schools ride the coattails of Texas, but there have been reports by OrangeBloods.com, a website that covers the Longhorns, that Texas A&M could be considering a move to the Southeastern Conference.

Texas officials appear to be cool to the idea of joining the SEC, so such a move by Texas A&M could threaten a rivalry with the Longhorns that is more than a century old and is ingrained in the state's culture.

SEC Commissioner Mike Slive, through a spokesman, declined to be interviewed.

The push for Texas

Meanwhile, the Big Ten has reached out to Texas, perhaps with a willingness to also accept Texas A&M. But it apparently is reluctant to accept another Texas school in the Big 12, Texas Tech, because of concerns about its quality of academics.
The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch recently obtained an e-mail exchange between Ohio State University President E. Gordon Gee and Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany, in which Gee mentioned a "Tech" problem. Texas Tech isn't viewed as a fit for the Big Ten because it is not part of the Association of American Universities (AAU), a group of 63 major research institutions that includes all Big Ten schools as well as Nebraska. Texas and Texas A&M are members of the AAU.

For all its clout, Texas — a publicly funded school — likely would feel some heat from the Texas Legislature if it changed leagues without taking Texas Tech with it.

But Texas easily could find a home in the Pac-10, which also could welcome Texas Tech, Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State to create the nation's first 16-team super-conference in football.

Another option would be for the Big 12 to remain intact after Colorado and Nebraska leave and add two or more schools. It's unclear whether such an arrangement would yield the type of massive revenue forecast for the Big Ten and SEC for any school other than Texas. The Associated Press reported that Texas and Texas A&M officials met Thursday and that the schools remaining in the Big 12 was still among the possibilities.

Significant realignment of college sports would have a broad impact. For starters, fans would have to adjust.

"Whenever you expand the footprint of a conference, you are losing some traditional rivalries," Wake Forest athletics director Ron Wellman said. "Under most competitive models, you won't play those rivalries as much as you have in the past. That's a rather significant change for the fans."

Another worry is that the rich conferences will get bigger, stronger and richer while others will meet their demise.

Even a proud, tradition-rich school such as Kansas could be left scrambling for a new home. The school has won three national championships in men's basketball and boasts basketball founder James Naismith as its first coach, but its football program isn't attractive on a national scale, and the state's population is too small to add value to a conference cable network.

That's the harsh reality of today's college sports.

"We have one of the top followings in the country, and I feel helpless," Kansas men's basketball coach Bill Self said. "We're on the outside looking in. There are so many components in conference expansion. Basketball is not one of them.

"This is not panic mode, but it's a big, big deal. It certainly can change the whole climate for your university for the next 30 years."
On many levels, expansion and realignment are nothing new. The SEC took Arkansas and South Carolina in 1990. The ACC grabbed Florida State in 1991, and Miami, Boston College and Virginia Tech during the past decade.

But the number and scope of the potential shifts at one time seems unprecedented. The Pac-10, for example, had not added a school since 1978.

And no one is sure where this is all headed.

"There is anxiety associated with any type of change," Wellman said. "It remains to be seen if the changes that may or may not occur will be beneficial to college athletics overall. I would say the changes made in the past have been beneficial. I don't think we need to fear change. I think we need to make sure the changes are appropriate."

Is it really about academics?

While acknowledging that the flourishing Big Ten Network is one reason to expand, Big Ten Commissioner Delany has said expansion is one way the league's schools can counter a general population shift to the South from the Midwest. He also has said that academics are a top priority, emphasizing AAU membership as a requirement for Big Ten membership.

An exception would be Notre Dame, not an AAU member but strong academically and long coveted by the league. Notre Dame turned down the league for membership in 1999.

"Of course they're going to say that," Smith College economics professor Andrew Zimbalist said of the Big Ten's repeated emphasis on academics. "What are they going to say? 'We're going to prostitute ourselves?'"

If the Big Ten truly valued academics, it would not pick Nebraska, Zimbalist said. He notes the school's academics aren't on par with those of Michigan, Illinois and other Big Ten schools.

"What's happened over the decades, more so in the last two, commercial value has trumped academic value, and that's decidedly wrong," he said.

Yet in a slumping economy, it stands to reason that schools are looking to improve their bottom lines.

"It's understandable there are certain financial pressures and they're trying to sustain themselves," Zimbalist said. "It doesn't mean it's the right thing to do to subject yourself to the needs of TV and media."

In the eastern half of the country, the SEC, ACC and Big East are cautiously eyeing developments in the Big Ten, Pac-10 and Big 12.
Last week the SEC's Slive, whose members include football powerhouses such as Florida and Alabama, said he was comfortable with the league's lofty status but could be strategic to counter a significant shift in conference paradigm.

For now, that depends on the Big Ten and Pac-10, and how large they grow.
Forsee: 'We're on top of' conference realignment issue

The UM system president said MU has a record of loyalty to the Big 12.

By Travis Cornejo and Zach Toombs

UM system President Gary Forsee refused to comment on rumors of MU’s possible conference realignment, but said university officials have the issue under control, after the Board of Curators meeting around 6 p.m. Thursday.

The curators, the university's governing board, began their meetings at 9 a.m. this morning, in wake of the University of Colorado's official announcement of its move to the Pac-10 conference.

"I know there's been a lot of speculation today about conference realignment," Forsee said. "Colorado’s move has a big effect on the Big 12. We won’t feed any speculation, but rest assured that we are on top of this. Rest assured that MU is going to continue to be important on a national stage, despite whatever happens."

Forsee said rumors regarding conference realignment have gained too much attention in the past few days.

"The Big 12 dissolving is total speculation," Forsee said. "Colorado’s move is the only fact we have at this point."

The UM system president also refused to comment on rumors of Nebraska moving to the Big Ten conference.

"I haven’t seen the comment from Nebraska," he said. "I’ve seen a lot of rumors about it, but I haven’t seen the comment itself."

Forsee closed by reaffirming MU's "history of loyalty" to the Big 12 conference.

"We have been loyal members of the Big 12," Forsee said. "I don’t think we need to justify our loyalty."

Chancellor Brady Deaton said the Big 12 is far from dead, despite Colorado’s move to the Pac-10.

"The Big 12 is certainly well," Deaton said. "We’re just minus one right now."
Deaton says he 'won't speculate' on Big 12 realignment

Chancellor Brady Deaton said commenting on the university's possible conference realignment would only "add speculation to speculation" after leaving the Board of Curators executive session early around 5:15 p.m.

Although he refused to discuss what details of conference realignment the curators were discussing in their closed session, he did confirm the board is talking over all the options regarding MU's possible departure from the Big 12. He also said rumors that the Big 12 is all but dead are exaggerating.

"The Big 12 is certainly well," Deaton said. "We're just minus one right now."