Big 12 bounces back, lives to play again

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Staring at extinction, the Big 12 is once again in play.

The beleaguered conference made a rousing comeback Monday, when Texas declined an invitation to join the Pac-10 and decided to stay in the Big 12.

Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M quickly followed the Longhorns by recommitting to the conference after commissioner Dan Beebe convinced his members they would make more money in television and media deals in a 10-team Big 12 then in a 16-team Pac-10.

A person with direct knowledge of discussions among the Big 12’s remaining members said Texas is clear to set up its own TV network and keep all proceeds in exchange for remaining in the Big 12. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because final details had not been worked out.

“Everybody is feeling much more confident the Big 12 is going to survive,” the person said. “Everybody’s going to be making more money.”

Texas A&M president R. Bowen Loftin provided additional details regarding A&M’s decision in a letter addressed to “The Aggie Family” posted on the school’s website Monday night. He said by remaining a member of the Big 12: “We were able to more than double our financial return to the levels being offered by other conferences.”

Loftin added that another consideration in staying in the conference was maintaining Texas A&M’s “strong foothold” in the state and preserving rivalries that date back “more than 100 years.”

All that talk about the Pac-16, the first super conference that would span from Seattle to the Lone Star state? Done.

“University of Texas president Bill Powers has informed us that the 10 remaining schools in the
"Big 12 Conference intend to stay together," Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said in a statement. "We are excited about the future of the Pac-10 Conference and we will continue to evaluate future expansion opportunities under the guidelines previously set forth by our presidents and chancellors."

Powers declined comment when asked by the AP about details of the deal that kept Big 12 together.

The conference, born in 1996 when the Big 8 merged with members of the Southwest Conference, seemed to be falling apart last week when Nebraska (Big Ten) and Colorado (Pac-10) decided to leave over the next two years. Now the Big 12 is back, though there are still questions about how it will conduct its business.

Among those that still need to be answered by Beebe is how and why the Big 12 will be more lucrative now, especially when it cannot hold a conference title game with only 10 members.

Beebe did not return phone messages Monday, but plans to hold a conference call with reporters on Tuesday.

Last year, Big 12 schools divided between $7 million and $10 million each depending on how many appearances they made on regional and national TV. At Big 12 meetings earlier this month, Beebe said he expected huge increases in rights fees from both Fox and ESPN.

The more lucrative contract with ESPN runs through the 2015-16 academic year, while the Fox deal is reportedly in its final two years.

The Big 12 has increased the financial reward for every one of its members since it began play in 1996. The Big 12 distributed $139 million to its members this past fiscal year, more than ever.

"We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth," Missouri athletic director Mike Alden said in a statement. "The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."

The news about the Longhorns, Sooners and the rest of the Big 12 South powers staying put was especially good for Kansas, Kansas State, Baylor, Iowa State and Missouri — the five schools in danger of being left homeless if the conference dissolved.

Baylor football coach Art Briles, a Texas native who has spent his entire career in the Long Star state, put it this way: "I got resuscitated. You can take your hands off my chest. ... I'm extremely excited, it's like being given new life."

As for the Pac-10 and Scott, who was trying pull off a bold move that would have dramatically changed the landscape of college sports, they are left looking for at least one more member to get to 12 by 2012 when Colorado is set to join.
Scott’s next target? Utah from the Mountain West Conference would seem a likely candidate.

Scott’s plan was to add Texas (with Notre Dame the big prize in the conference expansion game) along with its main Big 12 South rivals — Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas A&M and Texas Tech.

Because Texas is the richest and most powerful of the Big 12 schools, the Longhorns were seen as the lynchpin to the deal. Wherever Texas decided to place its cash cow football program, the rest of the schools would seemingly fall in line.

But Texas A&M had represented a wild card, with school officials meeting with Pac-10 and SEC officials in recent days. If the Aggies were serious about leaving for the Southeastern Conference, no matter what Texas did, it was unclear whether that would have prompted the Longhorns, Sooners and the rest to decide the Big 12 was not worth saving with only nine members.

But that SEC flirtation turned out to be nothing more.

“Texas A&M is a proud member of the Big 12 Conference and will continue to be affiliated with the conference in the future,” Loftin said in a statement.

In the letter posted on Texas A&M’s web site, he addressed why the remaining 10 Big 12 schools chose to stay put.

“At the end of the day, 10 of the 12 schools in the Big 12 — including Texas A&M — have determined that the conference was definitely worth saving due to our collective strengths in academics, national competitiveness, geographic fit and overall financial value,” Loftin wrote.

Officials at Oklahoma State and Oklahoma issued similar statements, with OSU president Burns Hargis singling out Beebe for his “bold moves and intense efforts.”

The news that the Big 12 survived spread quickly.

“That’s great news,” said Scott Drew, whose Baylor men’s basketball team advanced to the South regional final in the NCAA tournament a few months ago. “Obviously, we’re very excited and pleased about the 10 schools staying together. It will be great to continue the rivalries and traditions.”
Big 12 looks to survive after 'Horns decide to stay

By BLAIR KERKHOFF

Posted on Mon, Jun. 14, 2010

The Big 12 survives.

Two weeks of frightening uncertainty came to an end Monday evening when the University of Texas ended its whirlwind courtship with the Pacific-10 Conference by announcing it will remain a Big 12 member.

Other Big 12 schools that could have joined the Longhorns on the ride out — Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State — followed suit by saying they would stay put. The other school invited by the Pac-10, Texas Tech, did not issue a statement.

Bill Powers, Texas’ president and the chairman of the Big 12’s board of directors, told Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott that the 10 remaining Big 12 schools intend to stay together.

A sigh of relief stretched across the conference, but especially in Kansas City.

“I think it’s one of those red letter days in sports history, especially for our town,” said NBA and NFL broadcaster Kevin Harlan, who lives in Mission Hills.

If Texas and the other South teams fled, Missouri, Kansas, Kansas State and Iowa State faced serious questions about their conference homes and future revenue streams.

Now, all will benefit from a financial windfall.

The details of a new television deal with Fox Sports Net are not known, but commissioner Dan Beebe said during the Big 12 meetings in Kansas City two weeks ago that his conference would be able to approach paying league members as much as $17 million annually — nearly twice as much as some members currently receive.
Kansas City also wipes a bead of sweat from its brow.

The conference basketball tournaments that generate as much as $14 million annually had been awarded to Kansas City through 2014 for the men’s event at the Sprint Center and through 2013 for the women at Municipal Auditorium. The Sprint Center has also been awarded NCAA Tournament first- and second-round games in 2013.

For two weeks, Kansas City, a major player in the basketball tournament scene, faced the specter of no major conference tournament after this spring.

“That’s what makes it a great day for Kansas City,” said Jim Haney, executive director of the KC-based National Association of Basketball Coaches. “So much of the game’s rich history has been written in Kansas City, and this keeps us at the center of college basketball for the future.”

Also preserved under a conference flag are long-standing rivalries. Kansas, Missouri and Kansas State might have found a way to play one another no matter their conference affiliation — the KU-MU football game has drawn at least 70,000 in its three years at Arrowhead Stadium — but conference play guarantees those games.

A key component in holding the Big 12 together was allowing schools to begin their own TV networks, and that’s in the works at Texas. It’s uncertain whether the Longhorns could have created the network while in the Pac-10.

Industry analysts have said that Texas eventually could earn $3 million to $5 million annually from the network.

“Texas, because of its size, is one of a handful of schools that can push the envelope on this,” said Rick Horrow, a sports business analyst. “It has the leverage to be a pioneer and the creativity to attempt it.”

The Big 12 was teetering during contentious conference meetings in Kansas City two weeks ago when reports emerged that Texas and five other schools were targeted for Pac-10 expansion. The situation seemed dire last week when the Big 12 lost two members.

Colorado announced its pledge to the Pac-10 on Thursday. A bigger hit came the next day when football powerbroker Nebraska announced it had been accepted into the Big Ten.

The Big 12 was now down to 10, with Scott touring his Oklahoma and Texas targets on Saturday and Sunday.

Multiple reports had Texas and others on the verge of accepting Pac-10 invitations. Texas A&M was being lured by the Pac-10 and had pursued the Southeastern Conference.

Over the weekend, Beebe made his pitch to the five schools — Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M and Texas Tech — to stay. By Sunday, reports emerged that Beebe’s plan
was gaining traction and on Monday, the signs once pointing Texas toward the Pac-10 changed direction.

In a statement, Oklahoma State President Burns Hargis praised Beebe for his "bold moves and intense efforts."

Powers and Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds will hold a news conference at 10 this morning. Beebe will address reporters at 11 a.m.

Monday’s events may signal a halt or at least slow a conference realignment trend. Besides the two Big 12 schools, Boise State announced it was leaving the Western Athletic Conference to join the Mountain West.

Scott of the Pac-10 said his conference will “continue to evaluate future expansion opportunities.”

But it doesn’t figure to begin a land grab that could have led to 16-team super conferences. Had the Pac-10 increased to 16, the Big Ten and SEC may have been compelled to follow. If that happened, Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State likely would have been among the teams left behind.

“The Big 12 is a terrific conference,” said Jill Docking, chairwoman of the Kansas Board of Regents. “If you were to disperse all its teams, you would suck the Midwest out of college sports.”

There is no indication the Big 12 is looking to expand and appears willing to forge ahead with 10 teams beginning in fall 2012. The conference will have to determine whether it wants to continue with North and South divisions.

The Big 12 will deal with competitive issues this week. What it won’t have to worry about is its survival.

“I’m proud as heck of the teams we’ve got in our league,” Kansas State basketball coach Frank Martin said. “It’s a big-time league with big-time coaches. I couldn’t be happier to be a part of it.”

**BIG 12 DETAILS**

- Who’s staying: Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State, Missouri, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech

- Who’s leaving: Nebraska (after 2010-11 season), Colorado (after 2011-12 season)

- On the field: Teams will compete as usual through this season, then the schedule will change to account for fewer teams.
In Kansas City: As long as the Big 12 is alive, so are the postseason basketball tournaments. The men's tournament has been awarded to the Sprint Center through 2014 and the women's at Municipal Auditorium through 2013.
Mizzou has mixed feelings about league news

By MIKE DeARMOND

Posted on Mon, Jun. 14, 2010

Tommy Saunders’ initial reaction to word that the Big 12 Conference had new life was simplistic but expressive.

“Wow!” said Saunders, a former wide receiver from Kearney who now plays for the U.S. national rugby team.

Saunders knew immediately what some of the larger points were. No divisions in the new Big 12. Everybody plays everybody every season. No easy conference schedules. No excuses.

“Every team plays every team to decide who is the best,” Saunders said. “That’s good for everybody.”

That was not the view of every Missouri fan, many of whom dreamed of inclusion into the Big Ten Conference, which added Nebraska on Friday but will stay with 12 teams for now.

“I wish they’d called their bluff,” said Drew Carver, a longtime Missouri fan living in Phoenix.

Carver didn’t like what he heard about Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma receiving more in revenue sharing than Missouri and other Big 12 teams.

“Nobody would sign something like that, would they?” Carver said.

The details of a new television deal with Fox Sports Net are not known, but commissioner Dan Beebe said during the Big 12 meetings in Kansas City two weeks ago that his conference would be able to approach paying league members as much as $17 million annually — nearly twice as much as some members currently receive.

There is speculation that Texas’ share could exceed $20 million and its own television network would bring in $3 million to $5 million more a year.

It has been a whirlwind last week for Missouri, one that did not play out as school officials intended.
Missouri anticipated receiving an invitation to join the Big Ten, but that conference added Nebraska on Friday and then put expansion on hold. Meanwhile, reports indicated Texas and four other schools might leave the conference and effectively end the Big 12.

Suddenly, Missouri was one of the schools along with Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State and Baylor on the outside with no assurance it would be extended an invitation to join any major conference.

That major conference wound up being the Big 12 minus Nebraska and Colorado, which kicked off conference realignment by accepting an offer from the Pacific-10 on Thursday.

"We’re excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth," MU athletic director Mike Alden said in a statement. "The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."
Muzzling wild speculation about a radical reshaping of the college landscape and quelling a developing sense of dread among many University of Missouri fans, the University of Texas on Monday rejected an overture from the Pac-10 to leave the Big 12.

In announcing its intention to stay, Texas resuscitated the gasping league, followed by commitments from Oklahoma and Texas A&M, and thus assured Mizzou a continued place in one of the nation’s top athletic conferences at a time when MU’s options had the Big 12 dissolved appeared fuzzier by the day.

While the Big 12 was stung by the departures last week of Nebraska and Colorado, athletics juggernaut Texas remained the key to the viability of the conference, which probably would have ceased to be if the school had left along with other Big 12 South members wooed by the Pac-10.

Moreover, such a move could well have triggered an avalanche around the nation, with other powerhouse conferences perhaps inclined to respond in kind either to enhance their own value or fend off raids of their own.

That may be yet to come, but Mizzou apparently won’t be caught in the middle.

Instead, the status quo largely prevailed — preserving the rich rivalry with Kansas — with a few twists, including what looms as an entirely different football format starting in 2011.

Without divisional play, each team plays every other team every year and there no longer is a championship game without the 12-team minimum as the rules currently have it.

Mizzou coach Gary Pinkel probably will have mixed feelings about the new setup. With no conference championship game, for instance, MU would have played for the national title in 2007 because it was ranked No. 1 after the regular season only to lose to Oklahoma in the Big 12 title game.

Then again, MU didn’t have to play Texas and Oklahoma every year under that arrangement.
Still, Pinkel surely is grateful to stay in the conference, which he believes is the key to MU's successful recruiting in Texas and thus crucial to its school-record five straight bowl appearances.

"We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth," Mizzou Director of Athletics Mike Alden said in a statement Monday. "The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."

The league's prospects changed with what one Big 12 athletics director had called "a last-second field goal" attempt that split the uprights largely through the assurance of a more lucrative TV deal evidently brokered by Commissioner Dan Beebe.

Still, the deal comes with a dash of irony reminiscent of the foul dynamics that seemed to destabilize the Big 12 from the time it was formed in the mid-1990s when the old Big Eight joined with the Southwest Conference to create what was either a merger or an expansion depending on one's perspective.

Among the issues Missouri had raised publicly in recent months was that of staggered Big 12 revenue sharing based on television appearances.

Rather than that being resolved in the new world order, a source broadly familiar with the new terms said the conference now will employ a tiered system in which "the rich will get richer."

Texas, Oklahoma and Texas A&M are expected to receive between $20 million and $25 million a year from the conference, the source believed, with Texas Tech and Oklahoma State on a second tier between $15 million and $17 million, and MU and others just below that.

That still would be an apparent leap for Missouri, which received just over $8.5 million in Big 12 revenue for 2007-08, the last year figures are available.

Multiple media outlets reported that Texas also was given the concession of being allowed to set up its own TV network.

The mechanics of that weren't immediately certain Monday night but may be explained at a Texas news conference this morning or during a scheduled media teleconference with Beebe.

Jousting over that issue is what ultimately drove out Nebraska, and Texas' weighty influence also was at the core of some of MU's issues with the Big 12 that came to the forefront when the Big Ten announced it would study expansion in December.
MU made it clear it would listen if the Big Ten were interested, partly because of the chance to align itself with its academic prestige and partly because it offered equal revenue sharing that netted a payout of $19.9 million for Illinois last year.

As recently as the Big 12 meetings in the first week of June, a source in the room said Mizzou's refusal to commit itself made it appear the school thought it had something in hand with the Big Ten.

But that never came, and Mizzou seemed on the verge of having neither conference to turn to before Texas' decision.

As for what MU would do if the Big Ten now beckoned, a source said the new deal included severe financial penalties for early withdrawal for at least the next 10 years.
The Big 12 lives but won’t be the same

There is plenty of blame to go around for big mess.

All over the Big 12 Conference today there’s no shortage of wonderfully giddy folks who are busy congratulating each other for their efforts in this remarkable 11th-hour act of conference self-preservation.

Like Little Leaguers doing the ritual “good game, good game,” Big 12 officials, athletics directors, university presidents, regents and curators are slapping each other on the backside now that they’ve saved their conference from ruin, kept century-old rivalries relevant and the sent new-found TV money flowing into their coffers.

“We intend to work very hard to make the conference as lasting and dynamic as possible,” Oklahoma president David L. Boren and vice president and director of athletics Joe Castiglione said in a joint statement Monday afternoon when it was announced that OU and a cadre of other schools would not defect to the Pac-10.

Feel-good quotes like this were coming from all over the Big 12 (though with a rather odd and surprising silence from Missouri other than a brief statement from AD Mike Alden that said,

See BURWELL • Page B3
Mizzou needs to upgrade football schedule in new world of Big 12

“We’re excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth. The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead.”

The Big 12 survives. But I just wonder if in the midst of this healthy backslapping, high-fiving, gasping and swooning, will anyone bother to take the time to contemplate how they all got themselves into this near-death experience in the first place?

Was it unnecessary individual greed or pathetic sniping and needless jealousy?

Were there too many people tugging in 100 different directions, or was it simply the worst reason of all: a conference commissioner and quite a few athletics directors who were fiddling while their football empire nearly burned to the ground?

If someone hasn’t taken the time to thoroughly sort through all the forensics and understand exactly why so many Big 12 schools such as Mizzou were so willing to openly flirt with other conferences— and how one of the most powerful BCS conferences in the country found itself on the brink of a historic and unprecedented apocalypse — then expect the Big 12 to end up in another life-threatening circumstance in the not-too-distant future.

And this time, I doubt if all the king’s horses and all the king’s men will be able to put the Big 12 back together again.

Everyone in the Big 12 shares a little blame for this madness, beginning with the commissioner who spent too much time reacting to the seismic shock waves that nearly destroyed his league rather than foreseeing the radical opportunities that were about to occur.

The instability and dissatisfaction that caused Missouri to flirt with the Big Ten and ultimately drove Nebraska and Colorado out of the conference, and the potential defections that finally were avoided in the 11th hour, were there for a long time. Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe waited until his house was being vandalized before reacting.

Why did it take Mizzou window shopping, Nebraska and Colorado bolting, Texas being courted by everyone but the European Premier League to make Beebe realize that he had a giant problem on his hands?

Why didn’t he see what so many other commissioners already could see?

And now that he seems to have satisfied everyone with the reported television deal with Fox Sports, I Hope Beebe came up with enough financial security to safeguard against another cannibalistic urge by the Pac-10 or Big Ten whenever they decide to expand again from super-conferences into a mega-super-duper conferences.

I don’t know whether to congratulate him for the TV deal he put together, shake him by the shoulders and ask him what the heck took him so long to do this, or quiz him to make sure he knows what just occurred is a mere pause in the action.

Because as long as Notre Dame still hasn’t found a conference home for football, the SEC hasn’t bloated up to super-conference stature, the Pac-10 hasn’t satisfied its craving for super-conference status and Big Ten boss Jim Delany still is busy figuring out how much bigger his conference can grow, I would not rest easy down there in Dallas.

And now let’s get to Missouri and the way it played (and was played) in this high-stakes game of conference roulette.

The folks in Columbia have been a little defensive about the way they’ve been portrayed throughout this mess, and in a way I can understand it.

“We were only doing what you would expect any institution, whether you’re sitting here or in Lawrence, Kan., or Waco, Texas,” MU president Gary Forsee said late last week. “Did we contribute more or less than any other institution in the Big 12 or nationally? No. I think we’ve all been caught up in now this national discussion that certainly has spread beyond the Big Ten, and the Big 12 is certainly in the middle of that.”

However, in the future, if you’re going to flirt with folks make sure you understand that just because someone asks you for your phone number it doesn’t mean they want to marry you (see: Delany playing you until he found a bigger, better deal).

Secondly, now that you are staying in the Big 12 and Beebe has put together a lucrative TV package that could pay you anywhere between $14 million and $17 million for just showing up, don’t just show up.

You complained the last time that Texas and Oklahoma were getting all the TV money. Well, guess what? They deserved all the TV money based on how they put together their nonconference football schedule.

In conversations with several knowledgeable sources familiar with the existing Big 12 TV contract, they scoff at the notion that MU was being jobbed by Texas.

“When that TV contract was first put together, it was with the intent of encouraging teams to schedule strong nonconference football opponents,” one source said. “We were trying to discourage teams from taking the Bill Snyder approach of schedule-making (cupcake nonconference opponents).

“So Missouri can’t complain about things if they’re playing McNeese State... while Texas is going to Ohio State and Oklahoma is playing Oregon. UA and Oklahoma deserve more money if they’re playing games that are on national TV.”

So now that the Big 12 has been salvaged, it’s time for Alden to go into those future football schedules and make them attractive money makers.

No more McNeese States. No more Miami of Ohio. No more Nevada or Furmans or any other cupcake that will get smoked by 30 points, collect a paycheck and go home.

That’s not the sort of game that will attract a national TV audience.

Heck, that’s not even a game that will attract a local stadium audience.
Answering key questions on the future of the Big 12

BY REID LAYMANCE
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Q: When do the new conferences begin play?
A: Nebraska will move to the Big Ten for the 2011-12 season. Colorado initially announced its move for the 2012-13 season but might move that up.

Q: What about the Big 12 football title game?
A: The only sure thing is scheduled for Dallas after the 2010 season. The NCAA currently requires a conference to have 12 teams, and two divisions, for a title game. When both Nebraska and Colorado are gone, so is the title game. But with 10 schools, the Big 12 will keep its automatic berth in the BCS and its NCAA basketball automatic berth.

Q: How will the football schedule work?
A: Teams will play a nine-game conference schedule, facing every team each year. For Mizzou, that means games with Oklahoma and Texas each year. Previously, it was two years against Texas home-and-home and two against OU.

Q: Revenue sharing had been an issue for some schools in the Big 12. Is that going to change?
A: The full details of the new TV deal aren't out, but early reports are showing that Texas, Oklahoma and Texas A&M are positioned to receive more than in a tier system. The revenue for those three is expected to be around $20 million, while the other schools will be in the $14-$17 million range. For all, that is nearly double than in the last Big 12 revenue split.

Q: How is the money going to jump so much?
A: The conference's contract with Fox is up for negotiation in April and the schools received a briefing on the deal's potential at the recent conference meetings in Kansas City. No firm numbers have been released, but reports indicate that the loss of Nebraska and Colorado has not diminished the value of that deal, and there are indications that ESPN didn't want to lose the Big 12 and was willing to renegotiate sooner than 2016 when that Big 12 contract expires.

Q: Is the Big 12 going to have a network like the Big Ten has, or the Pac-10 is talking about?
A: No. Individual schools would be able to have their own networks, which was a key point for Texas. At the Big 12 meetings, Nebraska asked if Texas would turn over its network rights to the Big 12, and the Longhorns said no. That was one factor that led the Cornhuskers to leave. The Pac-10 was going to form its own network and would not have let Texas form its own there, either. Networks will probably be defined to include more than television and include streaming content on the Internet. The SEC's recent deal with ESPN allows its schools to own their own local television rights.

Q: Is this good for Missouri?
A: If the revenue doubles, that is a plus. Some of the issues the school had with the conference (revenue sharing) still remain. But faced with an uncertain future — awaiting a potential invite from another conference that may or may not have been in the offing or being left to find a home if the Big 12 imploded — stability and maintaining rivalries are good things.

Q: Is expansion over?
A: The penalties for leaving the Big 12 are expected to be increased so it will be more painful for teams to leave. The Pac-10 might still add Utah from the Mountain West to go to 12 teams. But for now, the 16-team super conferences appear to be on the back burner. The Big Ten, which started all the expansion talk back in December, has said it will go back to a slow, steady study of the environment. A date to remember could be 2015, when Notre Dame's TV contract with NBC expires.
Texas decision to stay in Big 12 pleases Missouri officials

By Staff and wire reports
June 14, 2010 | 7:08 p.m. CDT

MU officials have said for more than a month that the school is a proud member of the Big 12 Conference. But with the Pac-10 and Big Ten conferences each poaching a Big 12 member last week, speculation ran rampant that the Big 12 could be the first conference to go extinct in the era of the super-conference.

That fear has been stemmed, for the time being.

The University of Texas on Monday said it was staying in the Big 12, followed moments later by pledges from Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M to remain in a league that had seemed to be falling apart last week when Nebraska (Big Ten) and Colorado (Pac-10) decided to leave over the next two years.

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton said he was pleased with the news out of Austin, Texas.

"We're very happy to hear that. We've wanted to keep the Big 12 intact, and it appears that we're going to be able to do that, so we're very happy," Deaton said by telephone Monday.

Missouri Athletics Director Mike Alden, who released a statement late Monday evening, also seemed pleased by the developments.

"We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth," Alden said in the statement. "The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."

The Texas announcement came shortly after Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott confirmed to AP in an e-mail that Texas had declined an invitation to become the 12th
member of his conference. Scott said Texas president William Powers Jr. told him "the 10 remaining schools in the Big 12 Conference intend to stay together."

Powers wouldn't give any details about why the school decided to stay put. The school has scheduled a news conference for Tuesday morning.

A person with direct knowledge of discussions among the Big 12's remaining members said Texas is clear to set up its own TV network and keep all proceeds in exchange for remaining in the Big 12. The person, speaking on condition of anonymity because nothing has been finalized, said details were still being worked out.

The fate of the conference born in 1996 when the Big 8 merged with four members of the Southwest Conference has been at risk for days, and Texas emerged as the key to the Big 12's survival. The Pac-10 courted Texas and other Big 12 South Division schools, while Texas A&M reportedly expressed interest in going to the Southeastern Conference barring a better offer.

"Texas A&M is a proud member of the Big 12 Conference and will continue to be affiliated with the conference in the future," school president R. Bowen Loftin said in a statement.

Officials at Oklahoma State and Oklahoma issued similar statements, with OSU president Burns Hargis singling out Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe for his "bold moves and intense efforts."

Beebe did not return messages seeking comment Monday.

The news that the Big 12 survived spread quickly.

"That's great news," said Scott Drew, whose Baylor men's basketball team advanced to the South regional final in the NCAA tournament a few months ago. "Obviously, we're very excited and pleased about the 10 schools staying together. It will be great to continue the rivalries and traditions."

Texas A&M had represented another wild card, with school officials meeting with Pac-10 and SEC officials in recent days. If the Aggies are serious about leaving for the SEC, no matter what Texas and the others decide, would that prompt the Longhorns, Sooners and the rest to decide the Big 12 is not worth saving with only nine members?
Texas A&M regent Gene Stallings said Monday he wants the Big 12 to survive and would vote to keep the Aggies in the league if they don't get a much better offer. Stallings said keeping the Big 12 together "would tickle me to death."

Stallings coached Alabama to a football national championship in 1992. He has said that if Texas A&M does move, he'd rather see the Aggies go to the SEC than the Pac-10, but his comments Monday suggested that would be a last resort.

"I know how hard all the Big 12 coaches have worked to make our conference the No. 1 conference in the country," Baylor's Drew said. "When you achieve that status, you obviously don't want to see it disappear. The rivalries and traditions and fans support are what help make the Big 12 the best conference in the country."

*Missourian reporter Dieter Kurtenbach contributed to this report.*
Texas stays, Big 12 survives

By Dave Matter

Posted June 14, 2010 at 6:28 p.m.

Texas has called for an 10 a.m. Tuesday press conference to announce it's remaining in the Big 12 Conference. Here is UT's official release, sent out to media at 5:53 p.m.

AUSTIN, Texas- The University of Texas' athletics programs will continue competing in the Big 12 Conference, the university announced today.

University President William Powers Jr., Men's Athletics Director DeLoss Dodds and Women's Athletics Director Chris Plonsky will participate in a news conference at 10 a.m. Central, Tuesday, June 15, in the Carpenter-Winkel Centennial Room, located on the 9th floor of Bellmont Hall (west side of Darrell K Royal Texas Memorial Stadium).

And that means the Big 12 Conference, minus two members, Colorado and Nebraska, has survived. Oklahoma and Texas A&M have also officially announced they are staying in the Big 12. Other schools are expected to make similar announcements in the coming days.

A source told the Tribune the Texas announcement set off a celebration within the MU athletic department Monday afternoon, which might indicate just how few promising alternatives MU had lined up had the Big 12 dissolved. As of 6:30 p.m., Missouri had no plans to schedule any sort of news conference.

We'll have more on this story as it continues to develop.
Same as the old boss

By Dave Matter

Posted June 15, 2010 at 12:20 a.m.

Last week, we introduced a blog post with a Van Morrison lyric. Now, introducing, Mr. Townshend ...

I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around me
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again
Don't get fooled again
No, no!
Meet the new boss
Same as the old boss
- "Won't Get Fooled Again," The Who

General parameters of the proposed Big 12 television deal that helped save the conference are starting to emerge — they're similar to what I reported here last week — but one thing is certain: The boss hasn't changed in this league.

There is some irony in all of this if what's being reported and what I've gathered is accurate of the new deal. Let's flash back to March when MU Coach Gary Pinkel told me this in an interview before the start of spring practices:

"Another issue we have in this league is you look at the SEC and the Big Ten, and they have revenue sharing. They understand you're as strong as your weakest link and that the strength of your league is important. So you share TV revenue. Even though we've been on the upper side of (Big 12 TV revenue)
ourselves, it’s not the right thing, in my opinion, for the Big 12. So there’s some issues here. Those things are out there, and that’s kind of disappointing. Other than that, they’re not going to let me make decisions anyway. It can be a great league, but there are things financially that are absurd. I can’t even explain it."

On Friday, when updating Missouri’s place in the nationwide conference chaos, MU Athletic Director Mike Alden touched on the revenue-sharing issue as well.

"We think from a league standpoint and as a league member there are certain things we can do collectively to be stronger. Part of that has to do with how we generate exposure through television opportunities. How do we share our revenue in an equal fashion? Because we know the stronger we all become, the better we all will become. We’re only as strong as our weakest link. ... Those are just a philosophy that we tried to portray to our league and we’ve thought they’d be important.”

Nonetheless, now that Texas and Commissioner Dan Beebe have indeed salvaged what’s left of the Big 12 by getting the rest of the league members to agree on a reworked TV deal, could Missouri find itself in a less fiscally competitive position within its league than before this expansion saga started? On one hand, MU is expected to cash in with significantly more league-generated revenue, but the gap between the top to the bottom appears to have widened.

A source with knowledge of the proposed deal said the agreement would not only be centered around unequal revenue sharing but described it as a predetermined three-tiered structure, where Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M will represent the first and most lucrative tier with the chance to generate as much as $20-22 million in league revenue per year. The second tier would consist of Oklahoma State and Texas Tech, who would generate around $17 million per year. Finally, the bottom tier would consist of the other five schools: Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri. Their range of revenue was described as between $14-16 million.

Under the league’s current TV deals with Fox and ESPN/ABC, half the TV revenue is split evenly among members while the other half goes into a pool and is split according to TV appearances.

Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe is expected to reveal more specific details on the agreement during a teleconference Tuesday morning.

I’ll be interested to eventually hear Alden’s and Pinkel’s take on the new agreement and the tiered system as described above. If so, it was clearly a concession to Texas and the other Pac-10 flirts that, ironically, could make the Big 12-minus-2 richer but more divided than before.

But perhaps Missouri should find a new cause to champion. The Omaha World-Herald discovered that MU is actually benefiting from the league’s revenue policy, moving from sixth place to fourth in league TV revenue for 2008-09, taking home $10.4 million compared to $8.4 million the year before, nearly a 24-percent increase. Under an equal sharing policy, MU would have earned about $300,000 less.

I don’t expect we’ll hear from Alden or Pinkel anytime soon. There has been no indication that they’ll be available for interviews on Tuesday, though Alden issued a statement Monday night
that didn't strike me as celebratory: "We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth. The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."
R.J. Matson/Post-Dispatch

Of all the analogies that have been offered to describe the University of Missouri’s role in the current reordering of the college sports universe, the one that rings truest is that of the rejected sorority queen.

Hoping that the studiest duck on campus would ask her to the spring formal, Ms. Mizzou bought a dress and had her hair done, sniffing to the other young women in the sorority that it was too bad they were so fat.

But then the stud duck asked the corn-fed Nebraska girl instead, and the mountain girl from Boulder got a date with the surfer dude. Now Ms. Mizzou is standing along the wall with her sisters, hoping the Texans don’t decide to leave the dance.
Why is it that Ms. Mizzou can’t ever get the break she very clearly thinks she deserves?

Any analysis of the college sports brouhaha should be prefaced by the statement that the whole frenzy has very little to do with the proper significance of sports in higher education.

But that cat left the bag a long time ago. Since the 1952 Rose Bowl became the first nationally televised college game, TV has called the shots. Things really heated up when Notre Dame cut its own TV deal in 1991, and major college conferences all began making big deals for TV loot.

They had to: Football TV rights money subsidizes every other sport on campus; a National Collegiate Athletic Association study found that only 25 out of 119 major college athletic programs made money in 2007-2008.

Successful athletic programs, particularly football and men’s basketball, engage the alumni and drive giving to the rest of the university.

So in the ’90s, smaller conferences disappeared — Missouri and the rest of the old Big Eight were absorbed into the new Big 12 with four Texas teams in 1994. The conferences formed a Bowl Championship Series alliance to milk more TV money out of post-season play.

Unfortunately for the University of Missouri-Columbia, during the years that television rights money was exploding, its football program was enduring a long fallow period.

The 5th Down Game: Does God hate Mizzou?

Even when the team did something right, the gods seemingly intervened. With Mizzou on the verge of upsetting the eventual national champion Colorado Buffaloes in 1990, game officials inadvertently awarded the Buffs a fifth down that allowed them to score the winning touchdown.

Beginning in 2001, Mizzou painstakingly rebuilt its program under Coach Gary Pinkel. The culmination came in 2007, when the Tigers actually were ranked No. 1 in the nation for a week and knocked off arch-rival Kansas for a chance to play its way into the national championship.

But when Mizzou lost to Oklahoma in the Big 12 championship, the Tigers not only lost that chance, but they also saw the hated Jayhawks get their BCS bowl bid.

The alumni’s noses have been out of joint ever since, wondering why the Big 12 doesn’t get as much TV money as the Big Ten, wondering why the University of Texas is allowed to scoop up so much of the Big 12 money, wondering why the Tigers don’t get no respect.

(Few people at Mizzou or anywhere else are wondering why the student athletes who produce a lot of revenue for their universities aren’t being paid for their extracurricular efforts. Then it wouldn’t be an amateur sport, you see?)

So when the Big Ten announced late last year that it was considering expanding — it added Penn State in 1990 as an 11th member — Mizzou decided to blow its own horn.
The Tigers, including their No. 1 alumnus, Gov. Jay Nixon, made it known that they were available. Mizzou boasted of the size of its two large TV markets — never mind that half of Kansas City roots for Kansas and a big chunk of St. Louis roots for Illinois.

Tiger boosters said Mizzou’s membership in the Association of American Universities — made up of the nation’s 62 largest research institutions — made it a better fit with the more academically prestigious Big Ten schools. This argument was overstated — nine of the 11 Big Ten schools were on that list, but so were six Big 12 schools besides Missouri.

Proud alum Jay Nixon announces tuition freeze one year before brain freeze. (Photo by Beth Suda/Columbia Missourian)

“I’m not going to say anything bad about the Big 12, but when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, I mean, you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at,” Mr. Nixon said in an interview in December with The Associated Press.

Much of the rest of the Big 12 wondered why Mizzou — ranked only 102nd in the highly regarded U.S. News & World Report rankings of national universities — suddenly was pretending to be Harvard on Hinkson Creek.

Last week the Big Ten punctured Mizzou’s balloon by selecting the University of Nebraska (an AAU member ranked 96th by U.S. News) as its 12th team. Meanwhile, the University of Colorado (an AAU member ranked 77th by U.S. News) accepted a bid to join the Pacific-10 conference.

Now Mizzou and the 10 remaining members of the not-so-Big 12 stand along the wall, waiting for the University of Texas Board of Regents to decide today whether the Longhorns will keep dancing with them. Texas (an AAU member ranked 47th by U.S. News) could flee to the Pac-10, probably taking arch-rival Texas A&M (an AAU member ranked 61st by U.S. News) with it.

Ms. Mizzou could be left staring at her feet. It’s hard to dance once you’ve shot yourself in the foot.
Texas stays put...Big 12 lives on

by Bill Pollock on June 14, 2010

in Sports

The University of Texas said it was staying in the Big 12, followed moments later by pledges from Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M to remain in a league that had seemed to be falling apart last week when Nebraska (Big Ten) and Colorado (Pac-10) decided to leave over the next two years.

In a statement released by the athletic department, Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden, said, "We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth. The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead." Texas met with the other nine schools in the Big 12 about a TV deal that would keep the league intact with its current programs. The Dallas Morning News reported the cable TV deal is with Fox Sports.

Texas decided to stay in a 10-team Big 12 for the foreseeable future, according to Orangebloods.com, could pay upwards of $25 million per year. Texas could earn between $20 million and $25 million annually in television revenue in the reworked deal, including money from its own network. Because the Big 12 has unequal revenue sharing, the deal will mean more money for Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma, who all would receive at least $20 million annually from the new deal. Missouri and the six other schools in the Big 12 would make between $14 million and $17 million, doubling what they currently receive in TV revenue.
Athletic Director Mike Alden released a statement confirming MU's stay in the Big 12 conference Monday. The news release followed similar announcements from Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma on Monday.

"We're excited about the Big 12 Conference and for its continued growth," Alden said in the news release. "The University of Missouri has certainly prospered during its time in the Big 12, and we are looking forward to future opportunities in the years ahead."
The Tribune's View

Big? Little?

Searching for a conference

By Henry J. Waters III

Monday, June 14, 2010

I am a finalist for “Least Informed Journalist” concerning the brewing University of Missouri shuffle for an athletic conference. What little I knew led to tentative thoughts that turned out to be false. I'd have a better record if I had given no thoughts at all. On the “inside” I ain't.

My contribution was that Missouri might get an invitation to the Big 10 based largely on academic “fit.”

I was bewitched by comments from the powerful extolling the importance of academics, not merely sports prowess or television revenue. Turns out the chosen schools might as well be academic midgets if they bring winning teams and an army of rabid, money-spending fans.

As Nebraska and Colorado take a hike and officials of remainder Big12 institutions lick their wounds, I like the comments of University of Kansas basketball Coach Bill Self, who says KU will be all right. The program is good. Opportunities will be out there, possibly with a Big 12 survivor.

“Don’t worry,” says Self.

What better advice for the likes of MU’s Mike Alden, Brady Deaton & Co. It’s not the end of the world. MU officials are not responsible for destroying the Big 12. They did not ham-handedly ruin their chances with the Big 10, which is making expansion choices for its own selfish reasons, as everyone should expect. The criticisms by MU officials of Big 12 revenue policies were nothing new. In blaming MU, Nebraska found a handy way to shift attention from its own defection. The body blow to the Big 12 could be delivered only by the likes of Nebraska and Texas, not MU.
MU was awkward in its public relations, a recurring disease. Its fetish for secrecy causes suspicion, snippets of leaked information tell only a rogue story and information from foreign sources stands alone, not elucidated by local releases.

So MU doesn't look too smooth in its handling of the matter, but it certainly does not deserve blame for having fouled its own nest. We simply have not had as much to sell as other schools in the conference, at least so it seems so far. If the Big 10 wanted MU most, MU would have gotten the first invitation.

Don't worry. Whatever will be, will be. When we know our options, we'll make the best of them. Oddly enough, MU and KU might suddenly be blood brothers fighting common adversity.

HJW III
Missouri remains in the dark

Deaton sheds little light after night meeting.

By Dave Matter

Monday, June 14, 2010

The Big 12 Conference was on life support over the weekend, but maybe the obituary can be put on hold.

After weeks of reports and speculation that pointed to the league’s demise, Texas has agreed to commit to a 10-team Big 12, Orangebloods.com reported today. Rather than accept an offer to join the Pac-10 Conference, Texas officials have been swayed by a proposed Big 12 television agreement — plus several concessions by the league — and could use its clout to keep other South Division schools from straying, the Rivals.com website reported.

That scenario would put to rest fears that Missouri would be left scrambling for a lesser conference to call home.

But there could be one hang-up to Texas’ legacy as Big 12 savior: old rival Texas A&M.

The Houston Chronicle reported last night that mutual interest between Texas A&M and the Southeastern Conference could soon lead to the Big 12’s third casualty. Colorado left for the Pac-10 on Thursday, followed by Nebraska’s exit to the Big Ten on Friday.

“With the departure of two universities from the conference last week, the Big 12 is certainly not what it was,” Texas A&M President R. Bowen Loftin said in a prepared statement. “We are aggressively exploring our options.”

Is Texas’ renewed interest in the Big 12 merely a bluff to force A&M’s hand? Are the Longhorns angling to paint A&M as the school that crippled the Big 12 for good?

Either way, any chance the Big 12’s remaining schools can patch up their differences and remain united hinges on Texas and its ability to keep the core of South schools from leaving. The Pac-10 has shown interest in adding Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, while Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott and his deputy, former Big 12 Commissioner Kevin Weiberg, reportedly visited all five campuses over the weekend. Texas’ Board of Regents is expected to meet tomorrow.
Meanwhile, Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe has been peddling a new TV deal — first introduced to the league presidents by network executives during the Big 12 meetings earlier this month in Kansas City — that has been described as competitive with the SEC’s current contract with ESPN. Multiple outlets have reported the proposed agreement could be worth $17 million per year to each of the remaining Big 12 schools.

“The information we have is pretty strong that the 10 members we have would continue to provide a tremendous amount of revenue if we hold together,” Beebe said in a conference call Friday. “We have pretty good evidence that if our 10 institutions remain, we have more value with 10 now than the 11 in the Pac-10.”

At this point, Missouri’s fate lies with Texas and Texas A&M.

“I think we’re reasonably optimistic,” Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton told reporters after last night’s University of Missouri Board of Curators meeting at University Hall. “Clearly, you’d have to be blind not to have concerns with what’s happening to the Big 12. That’s why it’s important our board continue these discussions.”

With a crowd of more than 30 reporters packed inside a third-floor meeting room, only Deaton, Curator Bo Fraser and General Counsel Steve Owens were present for the meeting. The rest of the curators, as well as Athletic Director Mike Alden and UM President Gary Forsee, participated via teleconference. The board quickly voted to move the meeting into a closed executive session, and the herd of reporters was sent to the parking lot to wait.

On Friday, Deaton said Alden was taking over as the school’s official spokesperson on the conference affiliation matter, but it was Deaton who addressed the media last night, though Alden was in Columbia, an MU official confirmed.

“It’s been productive, engaging discussion,” Deaton said. “No action was taken. It was a matter of exchanging information, reviewing a range of contract obligations. We continue to work in every way we can to strengthen the Big 12 and will be continuing discussions over the next few days as we watch continued speculation and the prospects of action that can be taken by institutions.

“We’re working hard on strengthening the Big 12, or the Big 10 as it is now — in other words, the 10 institutions left in the Big 12. Nomenclature has become very difficult in this process.”

Among the reported concessions the Big 12 would make in favor of Texas’ support:

- Big 12 schools would be cleared to create their own TV networks, a desire of Texas’ for years.
- The North and South divisions would be erased and football teams would play a nine-game conference schedule without a league championship game.
- The 10 remaining schools would split the revenue withheld from Nebraska and Colorado as a result of their leaving the conference, a sum projected at $20 million.
If Beebe’s Hail Mary pass falls short and the conference crumbles, MU could be scrambling for a place to land, all while fans, boosters, coaches and recruits grow restless for some resolution. Still, Deaton declined to address any contingency plans Missouri might have in case the Big 12 goes bust.

“We’re fully committed to the Big 12,” he said, “and we’re not going to engage in further planning or speculation about that at this time.”

Deaton said MU officials have had “regular, daily communications” with other members of the Big 12 but did not elaborate on those conversations. The curators concluded their meeting without scheduling another one. Its next regularly scheduled meeting is a teleconference set for July 23.

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