Carrying the Big 12 banner
Officials promote merits of conference
By Dave Matter
Wednesday, June 16, 2010

For the last 14 years, geography defined the Big 12 Conference's natural split into North and South divisions. But for the 10 schools that remain, the league's path to survival revealed a new dividing line: Those who were strongly pursued by other conferences and those who were not.

Missouri, after months of flirtation and speculation, clearly landed in the latter camp.

And as the Big 12's party of 10 moves forward in trying to heal fresh wounds from its bout with realignment, MU is left with little choice but to embrace the league's strengths and grimace through its weaknesses.

For better or worse, the Big 12 — minus two — is the Tigers' home.

"We thought the University of Missouri would be more secure and effectively rewarded by staying in the Big 12," Chancellor Brady Deaton said during a news conference yesterday at the Clinton Club inside Mizzou Arena. "We think this decision is financially responsible, the least disruptive to our fans and keeps our historic traditions and rivalries and competition intact and strong."

That conclusion came after what Deaton and UM System President Gary Forsee described several times as "doing due diligence," the school's analysis of its future in the Big 12 and similar projections for other conferences, notably the Big Ten.

"We owed fans that," Deaton said.

But despite a frenzy of fan and media interest over the last six months, the Big Ten never asked Missouri to join its membership, MU officials insisted yesterday.

"We've had no offer from the Big Ten," Deaton said.

Where MU might have erred, though, Athletic Director Mike Alden said, was not initially refuting any interest in the Big Ten as it studied expansion targets. Instead, Alden and other officials left open the possibility Missouri could switch leagues, making comments that fueled the speculation and damaged MU's relations in the Big 12.

Still, as Texas and its flock of South Division schools rebuffed offers from the Pac-10 earlier this week, there was cause for celebration at Missouri — because the Tigers, along with Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas and Kansas State, had no more promising alternatives than staying in the Big 12.
That became evident despite no guarantees the league will land more lucrative television agreements, only data from media consultants that project an across-the-board boost in revenue. With only 10 teams to share league-generated funds — Colorado is headed to the Pac-10, Nebraska to the Big Ten — the remaining Big 12 schools expect bigger paychecks based on current TV deals with ESPN/ABC and Fox, enhanced bowl payouts and other contractual escalator clauses.

“There’s going to be a bump,” Alden said.

From the league office to the networks to school officials, though, no one is disclosing exact figures that league members expect to generate under the new configuration or what the next round of TV negotiations will deliver.

“I wouldn’t want to give away any negotiating position for us in the future,” Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe said yesterday. “I don’t want to limit it to certain number when it could actually be a much higher number than what we’re estimating.”

“Current and potential payoffs,” Deaton said, “have the potential to be the second-highest in the nation.”

Less ambiguous is the Big 12’s method for distributing its revenue, which has historically been Missouri’s biggest bone to pick with conference policy. The Big 12 will not change its unequal sharing system, Alden said. The policy has been to share half the league revenue evenly and divide the other half based on TV appearances.

“We understand that. We accept that,” Alden said. “And we’ll move forward on that, too. In addressing that, that onus comes back on Mizzou. It’s incumbent on us to win more games and get more exposure on TV for games.”

Despite Alden’s preference for equal sharing, the latest available data suggests Missouri benefits from the current model. The Omaha World-Herald reported earlier this week that MU moved 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. Under an equal sharing policy, MU would have earned about $300,000 less.

“We’ve made our point … but at the end of the day, it’s what we’re going to be doing as a league,” Alden said. “I accept that.”

Neither will the Big 12 change its bowl selection process — another contentious issue for MU — nor does Alden expect the conference to change its name, despite a leaguewide commitment to staying at 10 members.

“Big 12. Big 12,” he said. “It’s a great brand, and we’re going to keep moving with that.”

Other changes are imminent. Football will move to nine-game conference schedules, eliminating one nonconference game for each team. Basketball teams will play an 18-game double round-robin schedule. Alden also suggested the North and South divisions could be erased, a move Alden discussed with other North Division officials yesterday in Kansas City, including outgoing Kansas Athletic Director Lew Perkins.

“The quicker we can get away from the North and South divisions, and just say, ‘We’re the Big 12 Conference, it doesn’t matter where we’re at,’ the better,” Alden said.
A sticking point for Texas to stay in the Big 12 was the league’s clearance for schools to launch their own TV networks, a project that Forsee said MU could explore, perhaps through its School of Journalism.

"Why shouldn’t there be a Mizzou Network?" he said. "Why shouldn’t we take advantage of our great history and monetize that? Stay tuned."

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MU coaches relieved after last-minute deal

By David Briggs

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Call it the Texas-sized elephant in the room.

When Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden and the school's coaches gathered for their monthly meeting Monday afternoon, it was curiously business as usual.

The agenda: performance evaluations, vacation schedules and the Tigers’ summer sports camps.

Coaches hoping to find clarity about Missouri's conference home left disappointed. Alden, without confirmation of reports that lynchpin Texas planned to recommit to a 10-team Big 12, had no new information.

"We walked out of the room, and personally, it was like I had been hit by Mike Tyson," MU softball Coach Ehren Earleywine said. "I was more confused than ever."

What would he tell his 2011 recruits, who had grown nervous the Big 12 would implode? Would he be able to recruit high-level talent if Missouri landed in the Mountain West Conference? How many of his coaching colleagues would even stay at MU?

All those “negative” thoughts continued to churn through his mind until ... wait, what’s this?

Breaking news: The Big 12 is saved, he saw ESPN confirm later that night.

"I feel so relieved," Earleywine said. "I really feel like a big weight has been lifted."

His colleagues agreed.

"Obviously," volleyball Coach Wayne Kreklow said, “to have this put to bed is a big help.”

Said wrestling Coach Brian Smith: “We’re in the conference where we belong.”

For Missouri’s purposes, the league is far from perfect. Concessions were made to the Big 12 South powers, revenue will continue to be distributed unequally and the departure of Nebraska and Colorado is another hit to Olympic sports with only a handful of conference teams.

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But a home in the new Big 12 — and projections of increased television revenue — beats many alternatives.
Since the Big 12 went into meltdown mode at the league’s annual meetings two weeks ago, many of Missouri’s coaches had been on edge. The Tigers, along with Baylor, Kansas, Kansas State and Iowa State, had no clear place to go if the league disappeared.

With no invite from the Big Ten, coaches heard rumors of MU moving everywhere from the Big East to a supercharged Southeastern Conference to the MWC. The uncertainty was worrying.

New women’s basketball Coach Robin Pingeton, who left Illinois State for the chance to be in the Big 12, seemed to send Alden a text a minute checking for updates.

“I may have a text from her on my phone. I haven’t checked yet,” Alden said with a smile after yesterday’s press conference.

Recruits, too, sought frequent updates.

“You’re trying to reassure them and talk them through it,” Kreklow said. “But, obviously, there were some big questions when you start talking about potentially going to the Mountain West or Big East. … There are parents wondering, ‘Am I going to be able to see my daughter play?’”

MU soccer Coach Bryan Blitz wasn’t as willing to indulge in the rumors. Blitz said he told recruits that he firmly expected the Tigers would remain in the Big 12.

“I just assumed it was going to be the way it was going to be, everything was going to be OK, and everything was going to work out,” Blitz said. “In the end, it saved me a lot of unforeseen stress.”

Perhaps others should have taken his cue. It seems unlikely Missouri, the flagship school in a state with 6 million people, would have been left out of a major conference. But for most MU coaches, even the speculation was rattling.

Although Earleywine said he had no intention of leaving Missouri regardless of its conference affiliation, he believed a move to a lesser-funded midmajor conference such as the MWC would have led to other coaches leaving.

“I have a feeling,” he said, “there might have been an uprising.”

Reach David Briggs at dbriggs@columbiatribune.com.
Questions arise about concessions

By Dave Matter
Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Did the Big 12’s Unwanted Five concede bundles of cash to the Holy Trinity? That was the mystery yesterday as the story of the Big 12 Conference’s survival unfolded.

In a conference call with reporters in the morning, Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe said Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri agreed to give Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M league revenue that will be withheld from departing members Nebraska and Colorado, a sum projected at $20 million. The agreement was interpreted as a concession to keep the three South Division schools from joining the Pac-10 Conference.

In an e-mail to the Tribune, Big 12 Assistant Commissioner for Communications Bob Burda called it a “good-faith offer.”

"The five agreed that, if necessary, they would use a portion of their shares of the money Colorado and Nebraska will owe for leaving the Big 12 to ensure a certain level of revenue distribution," Burda wrote.

Later, at Missouri’s news conference, there seemed to be some discrepancy and confusion. Athletic Director Mike Alden insisted there was no concession, while Chancellor Brady Deaton said the five schools merely agreed to amend conference bylaws to allow for more flexibility in managing revenue, “so the conference,” Deaton said, “can approach this kind of competitive raid.”

Iowa State officials described the offer more clearly. Cyclones Athletic Director Jamie Pollard told reporters in Ames, Iowa, that the five schools earmarked some money to compensate Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma for any revenue they lost in turning down the Pac-10. But Pollard said he did not expect the three South schools to collect that money based on projected increases in bowl payouts, TV contracts and the revenue withheld from Colorado and Nebraska.

“We did not give away the future like many have portrayed,” Pollard said, as reported in the Cedar Rapids Gazette. “We wanted those three to stay, and so we figured out a way that allowed them to have a backstop.”

Said Alden: “We wanted to make sure everybody knew that we were committed to help in any way.”

Under conference bylaws, up to 80 percent of league revenue can be withheld from Colorado and Nebraska over the next two years, but Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman is objecting to any exit penalty. “From how I see the financial arrangement that they’ve been able to achieve, they’re better off than they were when we were in it," he said of the Big 12 during a radio interview yesterday, the Lincoln Journal Star reported.
Big?
A nomenclature problem

By Henry J. Waters III
Wednesday, June 16, 2010

As of today, the Big 10 has 12 members and the Big 12 has 10. No wonder University of Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton said Sunday that identifying the conferences poses a nomenclature problem.

Apparently the pared-down Big 12 stays intact with 10 members, and it was all about Texas. As the day-after fog clears, it seems conference officials and the 10 teams remaining after Nebraska and Colorado defected have been spending day and night accommodating Texas with pot sweeteners, a lot more TV money and the chance to form their own TV network.

The other nine schools will enjoy similar benefits. Texas, Oklahoma and Texas A&M will get disproportionately larger revenue shares, but everyone will get a big boost from a new Fox contract with revenues split only 10 ways.

Other changes will benefit the league and the fans. With 10 teams, the conference will have only a single division and all schools will play each other once, eliminating the championship game between winners of the north and south. This is a better set-up and ironically shows the advantage of a smaller league.

I can guess why Kansas basketball Coach Bill Self seemed so happy in recent days. He must have known league revenue would double and relished the prospect of the mighty Jayhawks forming a basketball league with the likes of Duke, North Carolina and similar powerhouses. I have no idea if this sort of “league” could or would form, but previously Big 12 schools could engage in no such conjecture, and if you have something to sell of the value brought by KU, an elite basketball consortium is an intriguing prospect. Perhaps the resurging Missouri Tigers can earn their way into such company. Mike Anderson’s group is making progress in that direction.

All we know today is Missouri is actually better off than before the conference trauma began. A 10-team league is more manageable, and the remaining parts bring enough TV value to boost revenue. What’s not to like, at least so far?
MU discontinues leases for Bambino's, International Cafe downtown

By Wonsuk Choi
June 16, 2010 | 7:48 p.m. CDT

A hot, summer day in June at International Cafe and Bambino's located at 209 and 203 Hitt Street in Columbia, Missouri. | Kristen DiFate

COLUMBIA — Two local restaurants at the corner of Hitt and Elm streets plan to relocate by the end of the year after MU declined to extend their leases.

Currently, MU owns both the land and buildings at 209 and 203 Hitt St. where the International Cafe and Bambino's Italian Cafe are located. The restaurants' contracts with MU expire in November.

Elizabeth Gumati, an owner of International Cafe, said she received a notice in 2005 that MU would not renew the lease.

Gumati and her husband, Mohamed Gumati, bought property between Lakota Coffee Co. and Main Squeeze at 26 S. Ninth St. in 2003 as an investment.

Gumati said they never considered moving their business until they received the notice from MU. They plan to move to the new location on Ninth Street by this December, she said.
International Cafe has been operating at its current location since 1989. Gumati said the business could have moved to Ninth Street sooner but decided to stay until November to enjoy one last summer with the restaurant's tree-shaded patio, which Gumati said she will miss.

Jeff Weaver, the owner of Bambino's Italian Cafe, said he knew when he bought the restaurant two weeks ago that MU would not be renewing the lease.

"We are not closing," Weaver said. "We are just moving."

He said he is looking for a new location and would like to stay in the downtown area.

Gumati and Weaver both said they've heard that MU wants to build a performing arts center on the 21,100-square-foot property, but they've heard nothing official from the school. A conceptual plan for redeveloping downtown, put together by Sasaki Associates on behalf of the city, MU and Stephens College in 2006, shows a performing arts center at Hitt Street and University Avenue and identifies the cafe sites as prime land for a mixed-use development.

Christian Basi, associate director of the MU News Bureau, said there are no concrete plans yet. "While a final decision about specifics has not been made, we will be utilizing the property for official university use," Basi said in an e-mail. He added that MU has no plans to demolish the existing buildings soon.
June 16 (Bloomerg) -- Cattle purchases by U.S. feedlots may have surged 23 percent in May from a year earlier, as profits continued for a fourth straight month, analysts said.

Feedlots without risk-management plans made $90 for each steer or heifer sold in May, compared with losses of $55 per head in May 2009, said Ron Plain, a livestock economist at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Purchases, or placements, in line with analysts’ estimates would mark a 2.5 percent increase over the average for the previous five years.

“There was a lot of red ink a year ago, and that just caused placements to be very light,” Plain said. “Now slaughter-steer prices are well above year-ago levels,” encouraging feedlots to expand herds, he said.

Feedlot operators buy year-old animals that weigh 500 pounds (227 kilograms) to 800 pounds, called feeders. The cattle are fattened on corn until they weigh about 1,200 pounds, when they are sold to meatpackers.

Slaughter-ready cattle futures for August delivery rose 0.575 cent, or 0.6 percent, to 89.175 cents a pound on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. The price is up 11 percent in the past year. Feeder-cattle futures for August settlement fell 0.075 cent to $1.109 a pound.

Price Rebounds

Spot-market steer prices averaged about 97.5 cents a pound in May, up 15 percent from a year earlier, according to USDA data. Corn, the main ingredient in cattle feed, sold for an average $3.68 a bushel last month on the Chicago Board of Trade, down 13 percent from May 2009.

Cattle prices have rebounded as global meat demand recovered from the recession and as U.S. beef output shrank after farmers cut herds in the past year, Plain said. As of Jan. 1, the U.S. cattle herd was the smallest size in 51 years.
“Last year at this time, we were just coming out of the low in the stock market,” spurring feedlots to slow cattle purchases over concern for future beef demand, said Jim Clarkson, an analyst at A&A Trading Inc. in Chicago. “We also had a wet spring, so there were a lot of things a year ago not conducive to placing cattle. This year it’s just a more normal year.”

The total feedlot herd on June 1 may have increased 0.7 percent to 10.476 million head of cattle, from 10.407 million last year, according to the survey. Producers sold about 1.89 million cattle to meatpackers in May, down 3.2 percent from a year earlier, analysts said.

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