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Missouri curators vote to explore leaving Big 12

by: ALAN SCHER ZAGIER Associated Press
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ST. LOUIS - It wasn't too long ago that Missouri chancellor Brady Deaton spoke of "working every day to hold the Big 12 together." Now he's been tasked with helping decide whether the Tigers are the latest program to leave a troubled conference fighting for its future.

University curators voted unanimously Tuesday night to consider leaving the Big 12 instead of committing to the league for the long term.

The governing board's members agreed unanimously after a four-hour closed meeting at the system's St. Louis campus to give Deaton authority to look elsewhere, specifically "any and all actions necessary to fully explore options on conference affiliation ... which best serve the (school's) interest."

And Deaton, the conference's public face through its recent turmoil, is resigning as chairman of the Big 12's board of directors to avoid the obvious conflict of interest.

Just one day earlier, the conference announced that presidents and chancellors of the remaining nine members - including Deaton - had agreed to equal revenue sharing and to seek approval from each university to hand over the most lucrative television rights to the conference for six years.

Now the Big 12 might be losing two members for the second straight year.

"The University of Missouri is a member in good standing in the Big 12 Conference, and I anticipate the university will continue to be a member of the Big 12," interim Big 12 Commissioner Chuck Neinas said in a statement released soon after Missouri announced its intentions.

One year ago, Nebraska defected from the Big 12 to the Big Ten, with Colorado also leaving for what is

now the Pac-12.

"What brings us here tonight is that the Big 12 Conference is now requesting that its members make binding, long-term irrevocable commitments to the conference," said Steve Owens, interim president of the four-campus University of Missouri system. "We don't fault the Big 12 Conference. It is something it should be doing in order to promote stability."

Speculation has centered on a possible Missouri move to the Southeastern Conference, which recently agreed to accept Texas A&M from the Big 12 starting next year

Deaton declined to specifically answer a reporter's question about interest in the SEC on either the school's part or the other conference. He said there is no timetable for the decision, whether a self-imposed deadline or a Big 12 loyalty demand.

"We're going to be exploring options generally and will be making no comments about specific areas where we have begun to look at," he said.

Conceivably, Missouri could remain in the Big 12, Deaton said, but the Tigers are officially on the market now. And the SEC could use a 14th member to balance a league that now has an odd number of teams.

"We certainly are not ruling out continuing in the Big 12," he said. "But we want to be sure to do what is best for our university."

The Big 12 also announced Monday that it had re-activated its expansion committee, but Neinas has said there was not yet a consensus on how many teams the league would like to ultimately end up with.



Missouri chancellor given authority to weigh league options

By Steve Wieberg, USA TODAY

The Big12 still hasn't found peace.

Missouri officials confirmed Tuesday that the school is weighing its conference alternatives — almost certainly with an eye to the Southeastern — as its governing board authorized Chancellor Brady Deaton "to take any and all actions necessary to fully explore options for conference affiliation."

It's the same action Texas A&M took in advance of its decision to move to the SEC, effective next year, though Deaton maintained that Missouri is "just beginning the process of exploration. ... At this time, we've made no decision."

Deaton, a former agriculture economics and sociology professor who became Missouri's chancellor on Oct. 4, 2004, announced he was stepping down as chairman of the Big12's board of directors. The league immediately named Oklahoma State President Burns Hargis to replace him.

In a statement, interim Big12 commissioner Chuck Neinas said, "I anticipate the University will continue to be a member of the Big12."

The move by Missouri - a 1907 charter member of the Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association, which evolved into the Big Six, then the Big Eight and Big 12 - came a day after the Big12 announced agreement among school presidents to equally divide revenues from all league-wide television agreements. Three-quarters of those revenues already are, but those from first-tier broadcast events tilt toward the schools whose teams make the most TV appearances. That agreement came with a condition, however, that schools sign over their rights to the Big12 for at least six years, committing them to league control even if they leave.

Before making that commitment, Missouri officials said, they want to examine their options. The school is concerned about the stability of a conference that has lost three key members — Nebraska, Colorado and soon Texas A&M — in a little more than a year.

Underlying that is disgruntlement over Texas' and ESPN's deployment of the school's new Longhorn Network, particularly its use of any high school programming.

"It's a time when we need to explore what options we have," Deaton said. "We certainly are not ruling out continuing in the Big 12, but we want to be sure we're doing what is best for our university."

Sports Illustrated

Big 12 should allow Mizzou to join SEC, let consolidation play itself out



Missouri would give the SEC access to two new TV markets, while also keeping it from the scheduling nightmare of having 13 teams
Scott Kane/ZUMAPRESS.com

Just get it over with, college presidents.

We know a lot of you want to reshape the conferences, so just do it already. Unleash your inner Charles Darwins, fire up the Conference Natural Selection Machine and go crazy. You're going to consolidate anyway, so why drag it out?

Tuesday, after a four-hour executive session, the assembled muckety-mucks at the University of Missouri emerged from their cocoon to tell the world that the school's board of curators had unanimously empowered chancellor Brady Deaton to take action regarding Missouri's athletic conference affiliation. In English, that means Missouri wants out of the Big 12, and Deaton's job is to send as many boxes of chocolates as it takes to the SEC office to get the Tigers the hell out of their current conference. The SEC wants Missouri for its two decent-sized TV markets (St. Louis and Kansas City) and because adding a 14th school would eliminate the potential nightmare of scheduling with 13. Also, Missouri is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities, so it would academically class up a league that would only have three AAU members (Florida, Texas A&M and Vanderbilt) otherwise.

But the SEC isn't going to just sniff the roses Mizzou sent, blush and invite the Tigers to share in its overflowing honey pot. SEC presidents are as worried now about potential litigation from Big

12 leftovers as they were when they began their forbidden dance with Texas A&M this summer. This is not a done deal yet.

It should be. All this saber rattling is stupid and pointless. If a school wants to move, let it move. Let every school take the best conference deal it can get, sign some new media rights contracts and let the rest of us enjoy what's left of this football season before the world changes next year. If presidents really wanted, they could hammer this out by the end of next week. If a conference gets consumed or implodes, so be it. No matter how the presidents try to portray it so programs can keep their tax-exempt status, this is a multibillion-dollar business. Companies go belly-up or reposition themselves at a lower level all the time. Fans, coaches and misguided sports writers* need to quit being so sentimental about all this movement, because the university CEOs certainly aren't sentimental about it.

*Before we go any further, here's a public-service message to the fans, coaches and misguided sports writers who still fail to grasp why all of this is happening. Schools aren't conference-jumping to win football or basketball national titles. This is about money and security. Yes, Missouri would find winning at football in the SEC to be quite difficult. But its options are to not win conference titles for a lot of money in a completely stable league or to not win conference titles for less money in a relatively unstable league. If this were only about winning at football, the SEC already would have booted Vanderbilt and brought in Boise State.

The return to sanity can start in the Big 12. League presidents hired interim commissioner Chuck Neinas to stabilize the ship. He can do that by bidding Missouri good riddance and by ordering any potentially litigious members -- cough, cough, Baylor, cough, cough -- to stand down and allow Missouri to move to the SEC. Neinas, who is much smarter than he has let on in his most recent interviews, knows full well that as long as the Big 12 has Texas and Oklahoma, the Big 12 is a relevant, commercially valuable league. It doesn't have to blow up. Texas and Oklahoma already have agreed to equal revenue sharing for Tier I and Tier II media rights -- meaning Texas and Iowa State get the same amount from the league's deals with ESPN and Fox even though Texas is far more coveted by those networks than Iowa State. Essentially, Texas and Oklahoma are offering to donate to the other schools to ensure the stability of the conference. On top of that, the schools are willing to grant their Tier I and II rights to the league for six years. That would make them worthless to any other conference and guarantee stability until after the league signs its next Tier I rights deal.

This works as long as Oklahoma wants to stay. The SEC would love to have the Sooners, and president David Boren also has been empowered to handle conference affiliation, but so far Oklahoma has shown no interest in the SEC. As long as that doesn't change, the Big 12 is perfectly viable. If it does change, forget everything you've read in this column. Something is going kablooeey. But that would require some firmly entrenched people in high places to change their minds. So let's assume for the moment that the Sooners are quite content in the Big 12.

Obviously, the Big 12 couldn't stay at eight schools. It would have to expand. For security purposes, it probably would have to expand back to 12 members. It can take BYU, an independent, without upsetting anyone else's apple cart. Unfortunately, it also would have to raid another conference. That conference probably would be the Big East, which has the next most

valuable set of programs. (The Big East could attempt a pre-emptive strike by courting current Big 12 members, but if Texas and Oklahoma are in for a penny and a pound, the others aren't going to leave their side.) If the Big 12 swiped three Big East programs, the Big East -- which already has lost Pittsburgh and Syracuse to the ACC -- probably would cease to exist as a BCS automatic-qualifying league when the next BCS cycle begins in the 2014 season.

And that's OK.

It might mean a salary cut for the people in the biggest offices, but the Big East could survive quite nicely either as a league of Catholic schools without football teams -- or, in Notre Dame's case, an independent football team -- or as a souped-up Conference USA in football with a still-formidable hoops roster. Businesses re-brand themselves constantly. The Big East could re-brand and thrive at a different level.

College athletics could get along just fine for a long time with five power conferences. The Big Ten seems perfectly content with 12 members. The Pac-12 has expressed its happiness with its current 12-school alignment. The SEC and the ACC would have 14. The Big 12 would -- math teachers rejoice -- have 12. Notre Dame would remain independent and far more relevant on the balance sheet than on the football field.

In a decade or two, something would happen that would prompt schools to begin conference-hopping again. That's the nature of the business. The Pac-12 was the Pac-8 until it became the Pac-10. The Big Six became the Big Eight, and then it joined with some Southwest Conference refugees to become the Big 12. The SEC once counted Sewanee -- now known as the University of the South -- as a member.

There is no need to prolong the agony of this particular set of conference corrections. Make your deals. Sign your new TV contracts. Count your money. The rest of us are tired of watching board meetings. We'd like to get back to watching football.

Missouri will explore conference options

Curators delegate power to chancellor in what could be first step to leaving Big 12.

By Joe Walljasper

ST. LOUIS — The University of Missouri Board of Curators announced Tuesday that it has delegated power to MU Chancellor Brady Deaton to explore options for future conference affiliation.

This could be the first step in the process of Missouri departing the Big 12 for the Southeastern Conference, although Deaton said the school is just beginning to consider its options and didn't rule out staying in the Big 12.

"The board of curators delegates to Chancellor Deaton the authority to take any and all actions necessary to fully explore options for conference affiliation and contracts related there to, which best serve the interests of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Missouri system," curator Warren Erdman said. "This action was taken unanimously tonight and is effective immediately."

To avoid a conflict of interest, Deaton announced he had relinquished his role as the chairman of the Big 12 Board of Directors.

"We will be exploring options generally and we'll be making no comments about any specific areas where we have begun to look at data or examine the situation," said Deaton, who added he could not give a timeframe for Missouri's decision.

When rumors of Missouri being a candidate for the SEC first circulated, Deaton repeatedly said he was focused on keeping the Big 12 together. That appears to have changed after the events of recent weeks.

"I have been chair of the board of the Big 12 and doing what we could to establish zones of stability in the Big 12," Deaton said. "Those discussions continue. We've continued, as you know, to have changes occurring from time to time with the departure of Texas A&M and the exploration of the Pac-12 by other institutions. Those discussions are continuing, and it's a time when we need to explore what options we have. We certainly are not ruling out continuing in the Big 12, but we want to be sure we are doing what's best for the university."

Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden went into a closed session with the curators a little after 3 p.m. Four hours later, Deaton, Alden, UM System President Steve Owens and Erdman addressed the media and explained their decision. By that time, interest from fans had reached a crescendo. Many fans found the teleconference number, as chants of "SEC, SEC" were heard on the speaker phone during the lengthy delay from when the call began and the actual press conference started.

Fan sentiment appeared to tilt heavily in favor of leaving the Big 12 in recent weeks. Those fans could get their wish. Schools must apply for membership to the SEC and then be approved or rejected in a vote of the conference presidents.

If Missouri does leave, it would mark the fourth defection from the Big 12 in a year and a half and leave the conference with eight schools.

In an effort to bring stability to the league, the Big 12 has asked schools to grant their media rights to the conference for a period of at least six years. That would essentially lock a school into the conference for that period, because if it left, it would forfeit the TV money it would accumulate for that period.

"What brings us here tonight is the Big 12 Conference is now requesting its members to make binding long-term irrevocable commitments to the Big 12 Conference," Owens said. "We don't fault the Big 12 Conference for asking for that. It is something it should be doing to promote stability. But because we are currently faced with making a long-term commitment to the Big 12, now is the time to explore our options to fully understand where we are without locking in to a long-term commitment with the Big 12."

Reach Joe Walljasper at 573-815-1783 or e-mail jwalljasper@columbiatribune.com.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Mizzou looking to leave Big 12

BY VAHE GREGORIAN • vgregorian@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8199 | Posted:
Wednesday, October 5, 2011 12:15 am

With a few carefully crafted but unmistakably pointed words and three none-too-subtle gestures, Mizzou sent clear signals on Tuesday night of its sentiment to leave the tumultuous Big 12 for another league, most likely the Southeastern Conference.

In an eventful 5-minute span after a four-hour closed session of a University of Missouri board of curators meeting at the Missouri-St. Louis campus, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton announced he was relinquishing his role as chairman of the board of the Big 12 in order to 'single-mindedly focus on what's really in the best interests of Tiger Nation.' MU proclaimed its resistance to the Big 12's call for a binding commitment of its future rights and bestowed a power on Deaton that provides the foundation for a move.

"The board of curators delegates to Chancellor Deaton the authority to take any and all actions necessary to fully explore options for conference affiliation and contracts related thereto which best serve the interests of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Missouri system," said Warren Erdman, chairman of the board of curators. "This action was taken unanimously tonight and is effective immediately."

The action has more meaningful implications than it might appear: It was how Texas A&M recently began its move to the SEC, which made no public statement about A&M's interest until after A&M opted to come aboard.

The move later was delayed by legal maneuvering, led by Baylor of the Big 12, but A&M finally prevailed in becoming the third Big 12 school to elect to leave in just over a year and was welcomed last week to the SEC, effective next year.

The SEC also has had no public comment about Mizzou, other than to quash reports that MU had been offered a place in the league.

But it's clear the SEC needs a 14th member for scheduling compatibility with A&M now aboard, and the conference's silence on an offer to Mizzou looks increasingly like semantics.

As recently as early September, Mizzou was an afterthought to the SEC, which has produced the last five college football national champions.

But the perception of MU as a strong candidate evolved rapidly in the weeks after a statement by Oklahoma president David Boren that OU was considering other options.

With the Big 12 then on the verge of disintegrating, leaving the SEC off the legal and ethical hook for poaching another member, the SEC looked more closely at Mizzou and liked what it saw in terms of what it could offer as a television market, as an academic institution and competitively.

But when the threat of OU and others' leaving for the Pac-12 ended with the Pac-12 announcement that it wasn't expanding, MU seemed likely to no longer be in play for the SEC.

However, as the Big 12 appeared to be in a position to survive, with or without Missouri, the SEC's perception of adding MU began to change. SEC sources have been quiet in the last week, but Missouri's actions on Tuesday would be foolish if it had no indication of a landing spot there.

"What brings us here tonight is that the Big 12 Conference is now requesting its members to make binding, long-term, irrevocable commitments to the conference," University of Missouri interim president Steve Owens said. "We don't fault the Big 12 Conference for asking for that; it's something it should be doing in order to promote stability.

"But because we are currently faced with making a long-term commitment to the Big 12, now is the time to explore our options to fully understand where we are before locking into a long-term commitment to the Big 12."

The Big 12, though, apparently will continue to try to persuade MU to stay. Interim commissioner Chuck Neinas has scheduled a trip to Columbia for this week to meet with Mizzou administrators, and he issued the following statement on Tuesday night:

"The University of Missouri is a member in good standing in the Big 12 Conference, and I anticipate the university will continue to be a member of the Big 12."

But even if Deaton said "we certainly are not ruling out continuing in the Big 12," anticipating that's what MU wants seems more wishful than realistic.

Deaton had worked intensely to try to preserve the conference in his year-plus as chair, but he said Tuesday that he was resigning from that post to avoid any perceived or actual conflict of interest "in order to focus more fully on MU's best interests."

He declined to discuss the SEC, saying, "We're going to be exploring options generally, and we'll be making no comments about any specific areas where we have begun to look at data or examine the situations."

Deaton said he expected to move expeditiously but put no time frame on it. Asked if a change could be made in time for next year, he said, "I don't think we know the full answer to that at this time.

"We're just beginning the full process of exploration and that would depend on, I think, the conditions we run into."

"It takes a while for everyone to be satisfied with the questions that have been answered," Erdman said.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Big 12 searching for stability

BY STU DURANDO • sdurando@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8232 | Posted: Wednesday, October 5, 2011 12:00 am

Visible fissures in the Big 12 first became noticeable at the conference meetings of 2010, when then-commissioner Dan Beebe attempted to gloss over the growing likelihood of change within the conference.

"I don't know that we'll lose any members," he said. "I think we offer a lot. If anybody is considering options, they had better look carefully at where they are and what the conference has done."

Never again would anyone commenting on the stability of the league be trusted.

Before the Big 12 could vacate Kansas City that week, Colorado's move to the Pac-12 was in the works. Nebraska's departure for the Big Ten was imminent. Texas A&M finally announced a move to the Southeastern Conference last month.

Amid alternating vows of solidarity and public bickering, the league backslid until reaching the very real possibility Tuesday night of losing Missouri. That university's board of curators granted chancellor Brady Deaton the authority to explore options for conference affiliation.

So, while the Big 12 faces the loss of one-third of its membership in little more than a year, the Big Ten, Pac-12, Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference have bolstered themselves.

Whether that path leads to super conferences with 14 or 16 teams, the Big 12 has much catching up to do.

Most of the league's schools took Beebe's advice. They took stock of their situations and determined that they should, at the very least, consider a new home. Beebe is gone now in favor of interim commissioner Chuck Neinas, and the league is scrambling to save face.

Squabbling over the Big 12's unbalanced revenue sharing structure and Texas' Longhorn Network kept the league unstable. Meanwhile every other BCS conference except the Big East has been gaining strength.

The Big Ten is the country's richest conference thanks to the Big Ten Network. And although commissioner Jim Delany indicated he is happy with 12 schools, he has said the league would consider its options should there be a 'significant shift' elsewhere.

The fact that some commissioners have made recent references to the magic number 16 is worthy of consideration.

The SEC will have 13 schools as of next year when Texas A&M officially joins the fold. Is the conference intent on evening that number? The Big Ten went about its business for two decades with 11 schools before Nebraska joined.

But SEC commissioner Mike Slive was bold in proclaiming "I could get to 16 in 15 minutes."

The ACC was the first to reach 14 football-playing schools with the sudden addition of Pittsburgh and Syracuse. And while commissioner John Swofford said the league was comfortable, he added "We are not philosophically opposed to 16."

The Pac-12 could have jumped to 16 when Texas and Oklahoma were shopping around but decided to stand pat for the time being.

Meanwhile, the Big 12 and Big East are in limbo. Texas Christian is scheduled to join the Big East next year, and that conference's presidents gave their approval for commissioner John Marinatto to pursue expansion.

Neinas has said he is waiting for the Big 12's expansion committee to decide on a course of action. However, he said several schools have been in touch with the league about possible membership.

Curators tell Missouri to look beyond the Big 12

By MIKE DeARMOND

ST. LOUIS | **Missouri has provided the strongest evidence yet that the Tigers will be the fourth team to bolt the fractured Big 12 Conference in less than two years.**

Emerging shortly before 7 p.m. Tuesday from a four-hour, closed-door Board of Curators session on the University of Missouri-St. Louis campus, chairman Warren Erdman of Kansas City announced that the board had unanimously authorized MU Chancellor Brady Deaton to look at membership in another conference.

“The Board of Curators delegates to Chancellor Deaton the authority to take any and all actions necessary to fully explore options for conference affiliation and contracts related thereto which best serve the interests of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Missouri system,” Erdman said

Deaton then announced he had resigned his position as chairman of the Big 12 board of directors to “avoid any perceived or actual conflict of interest” and “in order to focus more fully on MU’s best interests.”

Deaton said he will work with other MU officials “to expeditiously examine what may be the best conference affiliation for our university.”

Missouri is the fourth Big 12 school to authorize its president or chancellor to take similar action in the past three months. On Aug. 15, Texas A&M president R. Bowen Loftin was given authorization by A&M’s Board of Regents to explore conference realignment. Two weeks ago, the Aggies and the Southeastern Conference held a welcome party at College Station.

On Tuesday, Deaton and Erdman were joined by interim University of Missouri system president Steve Owens and Missouri athletic director Mike Alden. Deaton, Erdman and Owens made themselves available for only 10 minutes of statements and questions. Alden talked to the curators behind closed doors and did not make a statement or take questions.

Owens attempted to put the board’s action in context:

“A little over a year ago, there was a lot of speculation regarding conference realignment. That speculation prompted considerable discussion regarding universities and athletic conferences. Missouri was right in the middle of that speculation, and for good reason.

“The University of Missouri has excellent academics, is an AAU research institution, and it has a nationally ranked athletic program. This year, speculation about realignment started up again, and again Missouri was considered a desirable member from many conferences.”

Last month, The Star reported that MU had an unofficial offer to join the Southeastern Conference, pending resolution of the Big 12’s future without Texas A&M and with other schools exploring a move that could dissolve the conference.

Oklahoma president David Boren and Texas president Bill Powers also were given authorization by their boards on Sept. 19 that figured to clear the way for those schools, along with Oklahoma State and Texas Tech, to apply for Pac-12 membership. Boren said his school had “very warm and constructive” discussions with the Pac-12.

But two days later, the Pac-12 announced it was not expanding, and Texas and Oklahoma publicly committed to the Big 12. Following a meeting of Big 12 officials, Deaton and Alden would not commit either in the short or long term to the Big 12, leaving Mizzou’s options open.

There was no immediate reaction from SEC officials about Missouri on Tuesday, but Tennessee athletic director Dave Hart said last week that he anticipated expansion to a 14th team “in short order.” SEC athletic directors are scheduled to meet today.

As for the Big Ten, that conference has made statements that it is happy with its current membership. Deaton would not name the SEC as Missouri’s prime option.

“We’re going to be exploring options generally,” he said, “and we’ll be making no comments about any specific areas where we have begun to look at data or examine the situation.”

Deaton said it was “almost impossible” to give a time frame for when Missouri’s selection and/or acceptance of another conference might come to fruition.

“I’ll be meeting tomorrow with my team and examining all probabilities, all options, that we want to look toward,” Deaton said. “That will take some time.”

Owens suggested Missouri was faced with an implied ultimatum from the Big 12, much like the one then-commissioner Dan Beebe gave to Nebraska and Missouri more than a year ago when those two schools were speculated to have been looking at other conferences.

Nebraska jumped from the Big 12 to the Big Ten, the conference that many Missouri fans considered a likely spot for Mizzou. Colorado also left the Big 12 then, joining the Pac-12.

“What brings us here tonight,” Owens said, “is that the Big 12 Conference is now requesting its members make binding, long-term, irrevocable commitments to the conference.”

That commitment, interim Big 12 commissioner Chuck Neinas has said, includes a proposal that each Big 12 school sign over to the league its first- and second-tier television rights for at least six years. Those rights, which are for the Big 12's over-the-air and cable television football and men's basketball broadcasts, would then be split equally among the schools.

"We don't fault the Big 12 Conference for asking for that," Owens said. "It's something it should be doing in order to promote stability.

"But because we are currently faced with making a long-term commitment to the Big 12, now is the time to explore our options, to fully understand where we are, before locking into a long-term commitment to the Big 12."

Neinas had said that the Big 12 would remain a viable conference even if Missouri left. But there is now a question whether the ground beneath the conference will begin to move again.

Deaton did not rule out remaining in the Big 12, but he noted the announced departure of Texas A&M to the SEC and "the exploration of the Pac-12 by other institutions."

Deaton added that "those discussions are continuing." It was not clear if he was referring to Missouri continuing its discussions or was referencing other schools.

Neinas had been scheduled to meet with Deaton today as part of discussions on each Big 12 campus. In a statement released Tuesday night, Neinas said he anticipated Missouri would remain a member of the Big 12.

Deaton, Alden and members of the Board of Curators have been deluged in recent weeks by emails, most of them representing sentiment for Missouri to leave the Big 12. On Tuesday, fans chanted S-E-C on a teleconference intended to connect reporters with the curators' announcement.

Asked if a move to another conference would take place in time for the 2012 football season, Deaton said: "I don't think we know the full answer to that at this time. We're just beginning the process of exploration, and that would depend on, I think, the conditions that we would run into."

One of those conditions might be the amount of money withheld in exit fees from Missouri's Big 12 revenues. Texas A&M's exit fees have been estimated to be \$28 million split over a two-year period.

Time for Plan B: Save the Big 12

By SAM MELLINGER

Five minutes into the news conference, and my stomach feels like a moldy burrito. Missouri is gone like cheap gas, or at least that's the way it sounds from Chancellor Brady Deaton, who's stepping down as chairman of the Big 12 board of directors so he can, in the words of the Missouri Board of Curators chairman, "fully explore options for conference affiliation."

This is the playbook created by schools wanting to leave the Big 12, and this one is especially sad because it most likely means Missouri will join the Southeastern Conference and Kansas City will lose a major part of its sports appeal.

This is financial. This is emotional. This is more self-esteem than a region should probably put in a flimsy affiliation of college sports teams, but this is also the way it is in Kansas City. This is real.

If and when the obituary on Missouri's time in the Big 12 is written, this will be remembered as the day it unofficially ended. Consequences in Kansas City are permanent. The conference basketball tournament, rivalry with Kansas, common sporting experience — it's all either gone or severely diminished.

Even calling it the Big 12 feels more and more like a bad joke, and before we get too depressed you should read a text message from my friend Aaron:

YESSSSSSS!!!!!! M-I-Z...

Aaron, you might have guessed, is a Missouri fan. And he is among the strong and vocal majority — informal guesses range from 75 to 90 percent — of Mizzou fans who take this news like a raise at work.

College sports are at their best with emotion, and both sides of a drawn-out, tedious, speculation-heavy conference realignment drama are growing more emotional all the time. The drag is particularly heavy here.

But somewhere between the sadness of Kansas City's losing something special and the elation of Mizzou finding a more stable conference is an idea that we should all be able to get behind.

This doesn't have to be a funeral. The Big 12 doesn't have to die.

Missouri has its swagger, off to a bigger immediate paycheck and the foreverness of the SEC, and good for them. Wish them well, cuss them as good riddance. Either way's fine, but understand this:

Now is when it's especially serious for the Big 12 and Kansas City.

Now is when Chuck Neinas will really be able to put that conference commissioner's title to work.

The first and most important thing is to secure the eight remaining schools. MU had leverage to bring Texas off some of its revenue demands, but if that's gone, the negotiating environment changes drastically.

The league will survive as long as Texas and Oklahoma want it to, but the departures of Nebraska, Texas A&M and Missouri would create quite an enormous gap between schools with viable options and the ones without.

In other words, the league can continue, but there is no realistic way (Notre Dame is not realistic) to make it a net gain after a mass departure.

Still, if Neinas can secure the remaining schools, the conference can position itself to finally play a little offense. With a long-term grant of rights, the Big 12 could at least be sure that all remaining parties are committed for the first time in league history.

That means a clear push to BYU, TCU, Louisville and whoever else can bring some combination of football credibility, television ratings and stability.

It also means helping Kansas City secure some of what's been lost. Keeping the men's basketball tournament at the Sprint Center is a harder argument to make without a team in the state of Missouri, but city leaders should work hard to preserve the annual MU-Kansas football game at Arrowhead Stadium.

There should be even more motivation for MU to have an annual presence at the Sprint Center now. If it requires an exempt tournament, the NCAA should make it happen.

Every indication is that MU is following accepted protocol for switching leagues. Unfortunately, it's a procedure we're familiar with around here.

But if this is the end of MU's days in the Big 12, it doesn't have to be end of the Big 12's days.

If this is the end of Mizzou's days as part of Kansas City's favorite league, it doesn't have to be the end of MU's days in our favorite stadiums.

That much will become clear soon. First, the emotion needs to settle. On both sides.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Tipsheet: Pundits weigh in as Mizzou looks south

BY JEFF GORDON | Posted: Wednesday, October 5, 2011 7:19 am | [1 Comment](#)

Unless the Southeastern Conference has just been teasing the University of Missouri, change is afoot.

The school got the green light from its Board of Curators to explore affiliation with the SEC. Unless that conference backs off for fear of litigation -- or because it has second thoughts about expanding to Boone County -- Mizzou appears ready to move to Waffle House Nation.

Tipsheet is conflicted about all this, as noted yesterday. But fans eager to leave the dysfunctional Big 12 (Minus-3) are shouting down the traditionalists who cling to old rivalries and historic ties.

Here is what the pundits have to say about Tuesday's development:

Ivan Maisel, *ESPN.com*: "The Big 12 'family' is beginning to resemble a daytime soap. They argue, they leave, they look to leave, they come back. One day after the conference members agree to share their main TV money equally, a big step on the road to a happy future, Missouri decides to withhold its commitment. The chancellor resigned as conference chairman. It comes down to Mizzou forsaking tradition and loyalty, to flirt with the SEC, a league in which the Tigers are not equipped to compete. Knock yourself out."

Matt Hinton, *Yahoo! Sports*: "Of all the possibilities for expanding the SEC to 14 teams, Missouri seems to make the most sense: It may not be a natural fit geographically or historically — the Tigers haven't won a conference championship in football since the late sixties — but it is on the upswing competitively, it provides access to new media markets and recruiting grounds in Kansas City and St. Louis and it is ripe for the picking. SEC fans may not necessarily be enthralled about the prospect of disrupting longstanding rivalries for road trips to Columbia, Mo., if a 14th team is inevitable, the course may already be set."

Andy Staples, *SI.com*: "Schools aren't conference-jumping to win football or basketball national titles. This is about money and security. Yes, Missouri would find winning at football in the SEC to be quite difficult. But its options are to not win conference titles for a lot of money in a completely stable league or to not win conference titles for less money in a relatively unstable league. If this were only about winning at football, the SEC already would have booted Vanderbilt and brought in Boise State."

Dennis Dodd, *CBSsports.com*: "Everyone can blame Texas for throwing its weight around, but how is Missouri different at this point? It suddenly has leverage. It is holding a league hostage. It is making a perceived money grab. It could be the fourth school to leave the Big 12 in 16 months -- and it doesn't care. Expect the next few weeks -- if not months -- to be a period of introspection for **Brad Pitt's** school. Missouri has to decide if it wants to leave its ancestral home. The Big 12 has roots that go back 104 years for Missouri. It has to decide if it wants to change its culture from a Midwestern school to one with its base in the heart of Dixie. Does it want to be Bubba or Brad? Does it want to be at the center the Big 12 or a western outpost in the SEC? There is no right answer. The difference in revenue is negligible. Missouri could stay in the Big 12 and be secure at least the next six years. But the SEC would provide long-lasting security. Missouri football is an above middle-of-the-road program in the Big 12. It would be a middle-of-the-road program in the SEC."

Clay Travis, *Outkick The Coverage*: "Welcome to the SEC, Missouri fans, you've fought for a league bid when your administration wanted to stay in the Big 12 and risk the future. When the administration was too afraid to act, the Missouri fans stepped up and refused to risk the status quo. What if the Big 12 nears implosion again in a few years -- which it will -- what if Missouri is left standing when this game of conference realignment musical chairs comes to an end? Nope, Missouri fans weren't willing to risk that. Not hardly. That's because the college football universe has changed. And it's not all because of conference realignment. If this had been 1992, the last time the SEC expanded, Missouri's administration could have ignored the fan base and the massive percentages of Mizzou fans -- approaching 90% -- who wanted the SEC. But with the rise of social media, the Internet, Twitter, and Facebook, fans have the ability to mobilize like never before."

Sam Mellinger, *Kansas City Star*: "If and when the obituary on Missouri's time in the Big 12 is written, this will be remembered as the day it unofficially ended. Consequences in Kansas City are permanent. The conference basketball tournament, rivalry with Kansas, common sporting experience — it's all either gone or severely diminished."

Berry Tramel, *The Oklahoman*: "A little-seen cable channel lords over the sport in this autumn of 2011. The Longhorn Network has reshaped the landscape. Sent Texas A&M screaming to the SEC last month. Might do the same to Missouri. But before we curse **DeLoss Dodds**, or go all **Harvey Updyke** and saw off Bevo's horns, or hatch one of those silly plans to kick Texas out of the conference, remember this. If Big 12 leaders want to blame someone for the mess created by Bevo TV, their prey is easily found. Try the mirror. Big 12 administrators -- presidents, athletic directors, heck, even football coaches -- let this happen through their own greed and lack of vision."

Curators give Deaton power to explore SEC, other conference options

By Harry Plumer

October 4, 2011 | 8:46 p.m. CDT

NORMANDY, Mo. — On Monday, the Big 12 Conference asked its remaining members for promises.

On Tuesday, Missouri decided it wasn't ready to make any.

After meeting for more than four hours behind closed doors in executive session, the UM System Board of Curators emerged, and Chairman Warren Erdman announced that the group had unanimously agreed to give MU Chancellor Brady Deaton the power to explore options relating to conference alignment.

In addition, Deaton announced he had stepped down as chairman of the Big 12 Conference Board of Directors in order to avoid any "perceived or actual" conflicts of interest.

Both are definitive steps away from the Big 12, but Deaton declined to speculate on any specific offers from other conferences.

"We're going to be exploring options generally, and we'll be making no comments about any specific areas where we have begun to look at data or examine the situation," Deaton said.

Deaton said he will work with Athletics Director Mike Alden, interim UM System President Steve Owens and his "entire administrative group" to explore Missouri's options and added he will be meeting with his team Wednesday to begin the process.

The Big 12 asked Monday that schools move "expeditiously" to approve the granting of television rights to the conference for a minimum of six years, which in essence binds the schools to the league for that period.

"We don't fault the conference for asking for that. It's something it should be doing to promote stability," Owens said. "But because we are currently faced with making a long-term

commitment to the Big 12, now is the time to explore our options to fully understand where we are before locking into a long-term commitment with the Big 12.”

The next step in the process is for Deaton to actually explore the options available to Missouri. If or when Deaton decides there are more appealing homes for the Tigers than the Big 12, the school will have to apply for membership into a new conference.

The SEC has sent mixed messages about its future plans. Initial reports that Missouri had received an offer from the conference were denied by SEC spokesman Charles Bloom on Sept. 20. Commissioner Mike Slive said on Sept. 27 that the conference anticipates being a 13-team league next season. Just hours before Tuesday’s press conference, Vanderbilt Vice Chancellor of Athletics David Williams told The Tennessean that the league did not have a 14th team in its sights.

But Tennessee Athletic Director Dave Hart said the SEC will expand again, and the prevailing rhetoric is that a 13-team league is difficult to manage from a scheduling standpoint.

It is also important to remember the legal ramifications for the SEC to discuss these matters. Because of the potential of a lawsuit, the SEC does not want to be seen as a hindrance to the Big 12, and affirmative statements about the potential of adding Missouri could certainly be construed that way.

As for what the potential exit fee might be if Missouri were to leave the Big 12, Deaton again declined to speculate.

“We’re really just beginning the exploration of our options, and those figures would become very clear during that process,” Deaton said.

Interim Big 12 Commissioner Chuck Neinas implied that the Big 12 would live on and expand with or without Missouri on Monday. When asked if he felt confident making offers to other schools despite the prevailing uncertainty surrounding Missouri, Neinas said, “That’s a good question, and I think the answer is yes.”

Neinas made a statement Tuesday following the press conference that “The University of Missouri is a member in good standing in the Big 12 Conference and I anticipate the University will continue to be a member of the Big 12.”

Deaton did not rule out the possibility of Missouri staying in the Big 12.

“Expediently” is hardly a specific term, and Deaton said Missouri had been given no deadlines by the Big 12 to agree to grant its television rights.

Deaton referenced “Tiger Nation” multiple times during the press conference. Over the past few weeks, there has been a growing swell of Missouri fans who want to leave the conference.

Fans got a hold of the call-in number for Tuesday’s press conference, and there were multiple chants of “S-E-C.” A website, www.mizzou2sec.com, has been created and has a twitter feed to match it. Attendees at a Tiger Quarterback Club luncheon Monday were excited to hear a Columbia radio personality suggest that Missouri should bolt for the SEC.

Whether that will be the case remains to be seen, but it is undeniable that Tuesday’s announcement was a major step in that direction.

Missourian reporter Zach Murdock contributed to this report.

UM curators review final draft of new retirement plan

By Zach Murdock

October 4, 2011 | 8:34 p.m. CDT

ST. LOUIS — The UM System Board of Curators set the stage Tuesday for a final vote on a new retirement plan at its next meeting, Oct. 20-21.

The plan would affect new employees and would start in October 2012.

Discussion focused on the curators' continuing concerns about the plan's long-term cost and investment risk.

"The bottom line is that a defined contribution plan could be more expensive," said Betsy Rodriguez, University of Missouri System vice president for human resources.

In June, the board discussed a preliminary design for the new plan and posed questions and concerns to Rodriguez. Since then, she has made changes and, on Tuesday, presented a final draft of the proposal to the board.

The current plan is based on a defined benefits model, which specifies what percentage of an employee's paycheck goes into the retirement plan and guarantees the employee a certain amount upon retirement.

The new plan combines some elements of a defined benefits plan with a defined contributions plan, in which some retirement income would be put in investments selected by the employee. It would not guarantee a certain amount of return upon retirement.

Part of the defined contributions portion of the new plan says that in addition to the automatic 2 percent of pay invested, the system will match 100 percent of funds put into retirement investments — up to an additional 3 percent of the participant's total pay.

Since employees may voluntarily contribute more to their retirement investments in the new plan, Rodriguez said the ultimate cost is potentially higher than the current plan because the

system will have to match these varied investment amounts depending on how much employees voluntarily invest.

The debate at previous meetings focused on whether the system is willing to contribute more to a new retirement plan in exchange for some protection against market volatility, according to a memo sent to interim UM System President Stephen Owens about questions raised at the Aug. 19 curators' meeting.

Because participants of the plan choose their investments, the defined contribution portion of the plan shifts much of the investment risk to the employee. As he has in the past, curator Don Downing said he disagrees with changing the retirement plan and thinks the university could better mitigate market risks.

"You just don't know what's going to happen in the market," Rodriguez said.

With the help of Nikki Krawitz, UM System vice president for finance and administration, and her staff in evaluating costs, Rodriguez said she's confident the plan has been well researched.

"There was a great deal of faculty and staff input that was put into this design," Rodriguez said. "I feel like this plan has been very thoroughly researched and analyzed."

In addition, Rodriguez said detailed rules regarding changes in employee status and former employees who return under the new retirement plan are still being finalized and will be presented in full at the board's December meeting.

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Early, Intensive Therapy Better for Kids With Autism, Study Finds

Published: October 3, 2011 --Mary Elizabeth Dallas

Children with an autism spectrum disorder appear to benefit from early, intensive therapy to improve their social and communication skills, according to a new study from the [University of Missouri](#).

"It's important for children with autism to begin treatment as soon as possible," **Micah Mazurek, assistant professor in the School of Health Professions and the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, said in a university news release.** "The more intense or comprehensive the therapy, the better it is in terms of helping children improve social and communication skills."

People with an autism spectrum disorder have problems understanding, interacting and relating to others. For the study, researchers measured 15 social-communication skills of more than 1,000 autistic children and teenagers, including facial expressions, gestures, language comprehension, sharing enjoyment and appropriate social responses.

Although 95 percent of the kids showed improvement in these skills over time, the study found that those who received behavioral, speech and occupational therapy had better results.

Moreover, the children who received more intensive treatment at a younger age showed the most improvement in their social-communication abilities, the researchers said. Those with higher nonverbal IQs had the best response to therapy, they found.

"With regard to social-communicative symptom severity, our study reveals that it is not IQ alone that contributes to improvements over time," said Mazurek. "Instead, having a higher IQ may allow children to make greater gains in various types of treatments." The results also indicate a need to develop alternative treatment approaches for children with intellectual impairments, Mazurek added.

The study, recently released online in advance of publication in an upcoming print issue of *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, concluded that targeted, intensive treatments may be most successful in improving specific skills among autistic children.

More information

The U.S. [National Institutes of Health](#) provides more information on [autism](#).

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Ex-diversity chief in running at UNC

Tuesday, October 4, 2011

Roger Worthington, who stepped down as chief diversity officer at the University of Missouri this summer, is a finalist for a vice provost position at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Worthington is one of four being considered for the vice provost for diversity and multicultural affairs position, according to a list of candidates on the university's website. He is expected to visit the campus Oct. 18.

Worthington left the role of chief diversity officer and assistant deputy chancellor of diversity this year after roughly five years in the position. In June, he said he had fulfilled what he had hoped to while in the chief diversity position and wanted to concentrate on other things, namely being editor of a national diversity journal. He is on leave and was expected to return to campus in January as a professor in the College of Education's Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology.

Worthington left the diversity office shortly after faculty voted down a proposal to require all students to take a diversity course. He said in June the timing was coincidental.

Worthington could not be reached for comment this morning.

UPDATE: Ellis Library fire suspect charged with burglary, arson

By Jared Grafman

October 4, 2011 | 4:18 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — At least 10 separate fires were burning when first responders entered Ellis Library in the early hours of Sept. 10, according to a probable cause statement filed Friday.

Christopher Curtis Kelley, 25, was charged with second-degree burglary and second-degree arson in connection with the fires.

Kelley turned himself in to MU police after the department issued a clery release about the incident, which occurred around 3:30 a.m. Sept. 10, according to the probable cause statement filed by MU police detective Michael Laughlin. The library remained closed for three days and the State Historical Society of Missouri was closed for four days due to damage caused by the fires.

The likely accelerant used for the fire was a product used for polishing brass, according to the statement. Ellis staff estimated total damage to the library at \$600,000 to \$1 million.

Laughlin interviewed two people who knew Kelley, according to the statement. One said Kelley told them he had entered Ellis and left it through an open window, and another said Kelley "is known to walk around and try to find unlocked buildings" and enter them after drinking.

According to details in the probable cause statement:

- Police found only one open window, located in the library's Copy Service area.
- A container of Parks Brass Refurbisher was found lying in the mulch just outside the window, and Assistant Fire Marshal Lt. Debbie Sorrell said the product could be used as an accelerant.
- Five fires were found in and around the reserve area.
- Two fires were found in the Copy Service office.
- One fire was found in the Access Service area.
- One fire was found in the Interlibrary Loan office.

- One fire was found behind the circulation desk.
- Several cameras, windows and computer monitors were damaged.
- Human feces and urine were found on a study desk on the fourth floor.
- "WELCOME TO THE BUNGHOLE — WE GOT FUN AND GAMES" was written in black marker on a note found on top of a printer in the Access Service offices.

Footage from internal Ellis security cameras showed a security officer completing security checks at approximately 8:30 p.m. No other people are seen until a person, later identified as Kelley, was recorded on the security footage at about 3:07 a.m.

The clery report Sept. 10 included surveillance photos and asked for help identifying the person in the security footage. They received several tips that Kelley was the man in the pictures, and Kelley went to the MU police after seeing himself in the clery report. He was arrested shortly before noon at the police station.

Kelley said during his interview with Laughlin that he had left a party earlier in the night and decided to walk around, according to the statement. Kelley said he had been in Ellis and was the person in the security camera footage but denied starting any fires, according to the statement.

At the time of his arrest, Kelley was employed with the MU Police Department as a part-time events assistant. There is no apparent connection suggested in the probable cause statement between the crimes he is accused of committing and his employment.

Kelley waived his formal arraignment and pleaded not guilty, according to court records. His first court appearance has not been scheduled.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU students live the sustainable life

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By Xia Jiang

October 4, 2011 | 3:44 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Instead of turning up the thermostat when it gets cold, the residents of Mizzou Sustainahouse put on more clothes.

The project began in 2010 as an effort to provide space for students to live sustainably. For the residents of 210 N. College Ave., who moved in this August, this means conserving household energy, reusing and recycling, and eating natural food to reduce their environmental impact.

Junior Monica Everett, who is one of the six residents, thinks that choosing to live sustainably is all about planning things out.

"It takes a little investment in the beginning," Everett said, "and once you establish your habits, it's really easy."

One of the project's goals is to reduce household energy consumption in the six-bedroom house by 20 percent. To figure that out, they will need months of data, said Henry Hellmuth, a sophomore and resident of the house.

The average electrical usage in city households is 1,500 kilowatts, said Terry Freeman, supervisor of residential energy services with Columbia Water and Light.

But even though the Sustainahouse residents don't have a clear goal yet, they are trying to rein in their energy consumption.

One way they plan to accomplish this is by keeping the thermostat at 55 degrees throughout the winter. They also use clotheslines for drying their clothes and limit their hot water usage in the shower with a higher-efficiency shower head.

Another goal is for the house to become an outlet for people to learn how to live sustainably, Everett said.

The house also welcomes anyone in the community interested in sustainable living or simply curious about the project to stop by for group dinners held twice a month. These potlucks are held every other Wednesday, resident and junior Sally Waldman said.

"I hope we can be a visible part of the movement for more sustainable living and make it easier for especially college students to live this way and realize that it's a rewarding thing and an important thing for environment and for people," Everett said.

Everett is in charge of buying food for the house and gets it in bulk from Blue Planet, a nonprofit buying service operated by Mid-Missouri Peaceworks out of the Peace Nook. She also shops at farmers' markets where she buys food that is "as sustainable as possible." This means affordable food with the lowest environmental impact.

House members also bought two chickens, Gertie and Gladys, who provide the household with eggs and are fed a diet of food scraps such as apple cores and egg shells.

Inside the house, there are recycling bins for glass, plastic, metal, fiber and cardboard, and a compost bin that contains food that cannot be fed to the chickens.

To be considered, the students submitted online applications through Sustain Mizzou, an MU student organization. They were chosen based on their interests, year in school and the diversity of their backgrounds. They also had to submit a proposal for a research topic they want to complete while living in the house.

Waldman first learned of Mizzou Sustainahouse before Christmas break last year.

"It sounded like a really cool idea to promote sustainable living for college students," Waldman said.

The sustainable lifestyle is simple yet challenging, she said. "It's just a very analytical way of living so that everything you do, you wonder if there is another way you could be doing it that would be more efficient."