

# COVID-19 is threatening college sports. Conference realignment can save them.

By: Conor McGrath

COVID-19 has called into question many of the so-called “norms” in our lives. Should I continue paying a high rent for a tiny apartment in a crowded city? Is it necessary to travel to so many in-person business meetings? Do I really need to be ordering takeout five days a week? COVID-19 has forced many people and organizations to reflect and perform thoughtful cost-benefit calculations on their standard operating procedures. After what has been a devastating year financially, it is about time the NCAA does the same in regards to conference affiliation.

It is true that COVID-19 has directly damaged universities financially due to cancelled games, limited ticket revenue, and increased costs to institute public health procedures. Some athletic departments are facing over [\\$100 million](#) in budget shortfalls, many have implemented hiring freezes and across the country universities have already [eliminated](#) some of their sports programs to reduce costs. However, COVID-19 has also highlighted that many athletic departments were struggling financially even before the pandemic hit. In 2014, over half of Power 5 athletic departments operated at a [loss](#). Spending has spiraled out of control as universities spend hundreds of millions of dollars on coaching contracts, facilities upgrades, and travel expenses under what is, for the overwhelming majority of schools, a false hope that they can compete with the titans for national championships. This collegiate arms race is coming at the expense of not only [student-athletes](#) in non-revenue generating sports, but the overall student body who is being asked to pay athletic fees on top of exploding tuition costs while academic programs are being sacrificed through slashed funding.

Conference realignment has partially created this mess, but it can also be a part of the solution. By creating conferences with schools that are more aligned in their vision, are more equally competitive athletically, and more geographically proximate, universities can cut spending, rather than sports, and offer a more entertaining product on the field.

The following proposal outlines changes to the current makeup of every Division I conference. For Division I FBS, there will be a total of 9 conferences consisting of “Power 6” conferences and “Group of 3” conferences. With a max conference size (for football) of 12, the overall number of FBS teams drops from 130 to 96 as many teams are relegated to the less costly FCS while a few are moved up from the sub-division. The new format eliminates divisions within conferences, calls for a uniform 9 game conference schedule with 2 games out of conference and a conference championship. A 10-team playoff is instituted giving each Power 6 champion a bye, while the highest ranked Group of 3 team and 3 wild cards play in an opening round to determine which two teams will be matched with the Power 6 champions. This ensures that an undefeated team at least gets a shot at competing for a championship, something that is standard practice in every other sports league in the world, while keeping the max season length at 16 games.

## FBS

### ACC

Atlantic Coast Conference

Maryland, Duke, Louisville, North Carolina, NC State, Virginia, Memphis, Kentucky, Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Virginia Tech, Wake Forest



The ACC as currently constructed is a geographical nightmare. The fact that Syracuse has to fly from up-state New York to the southern tip of Florida to play Miami makes little sense. Even worse, Notre Dame, in the heart of Big Ten country is an ACC member in every sport except football... well, kind of. It still had to schedule a certain number of ACC teams each year. Then, COVID hit. Now, they're in the ACC. Next year, they won't be. But in a few years, they could be? That does not make very much sense. And let's not even start with the tiger in the room. Clemson has absolutely dominated the conference in football over the past decade. Have you ever dreamed of a world where your favorite ACC team might even have a shot at a conference championship? In a Clemson-less ACC, your dreams could come true.

This ACC maintains the Virginia and North Carolina schools and Louisville in the conference, but removes the far northern and southern schools in order to shrink the boundaries closer to Charlotte, which has always been the heart of the ACC. Additions from the SEC (Kentucky, Tennessee, Vanderbilt), Big Ten (Maryland), and American (Memphis), will help reignite historic rivalries (Let the D.C. office banter begin with the Hoos taking on the Terps each year). Backyard rivalries like these matter financially because its far more likely for Louisville lacrosse fans to make the trip to Lexington to attend a game than it is for them to fly to Miami. More rivalries means higher attendance across all sports, which lessens the reliance on football revenue and puts more teams on the path to self-sufficiency. In addition, this new conference would boast some of the most elite academic institutions in the country as 5 members rank in the top 30 of best universities by [U.S. News](#). Having a common agreement on academic standards is paramount to maintain a competitive balance and shared strategic vision. Most notably, the ACC would become the best basketball conference in the country. A conference tournament with blue bloods like Duke, UVA, Louisville, Kentucky, UNC, and Memphis might be more entertaining than the NCAA tournament itself.

## SEC

Southeastern Conference
South Carolina, Clemson, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Florida State, Miami (FL), UCF, Florida, Auburn, Alabama, Ole Miss, Mississippi State



In the SEC, football is king. So, if you're a self-identified "football school" in the south, what are you doing in the ACC? This new SEC adds Clemson, Florida State, Miami, and Georgia Tech. Three of the four already have their in-state SEC rival on the football schedule each year. Wouldn't these rivalry games be even more entertaining if they had conference championship implications? Adding these ACC teams not only reunites them with in-state rivals, but it also places them geographically closer to their competitors and allows them to focus once again on what's most important in life, football. That's why the fifth addition to the conference is UCF, the [self-proclaimed](#) national champions of 2017. UCF has proved over the years that they can compete in the SEC..., just ask [Auburn](#). Not to mention, UCF is the largest university in the country with nearly 70,000 students. They have the facilities, the location, and the track record. Now, all they need is the chance to compete.

Let's talk about the deletions. Missouri and Texas A&M were newcomers that fit better in their prior home, the Big 12. Vanderbilt, Kentucky, and Arkansas never truly fit in. Tennessee and LSU are probably the most shocking drops. Tennessee has struggled to compete on the gridiron, but has had some success on the hardwood making them a better fit with the nearby ACC schools like UNC, Duke, and Virginia. Plus, their rivalry with Alabama has been quite lopsided over the years, so while it can continue in non-conference, it is not competitive enough to the point where it needs to be played with conference standings ramifications. Meanwhile, a conference with Clemson, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Florida State, AND LSU would be too powerful. In an effort to instill some level of competitive balance across conferences, we bounced LSU as we'll discuss next.

## SWC

Southwest Conference
Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, SMU, Houston, TCU, Baylor, LSU, Arkansas



This new Southwest Conference closely resembles the old Southwest Conference of the 1990's with the Texas schools (minus Rice which has been a dumpster fire) and Arkansas (which never really fit in well in the SEC). Oklahoma and Oklahoma State stay with the Big 12 Texas schools to keep rivalries like Red River alive. LSU adds some competitiveness to the conference, especially in football. The move from the SEC shouldn't be too hard as LSU was one of those rare SEC teams without an in-state rival. Of course, they miss out on their rivalry with Alabama, but the Tide were more bitter rivals with Auburn anyway. Being in the SWC allows them to keep a rivalry with former SEC foes Arkansas and Texas A&M and could spark a rivalry with Texas, who they played in 2019 and had planned to play in 2020. With a big four of Oklahoma, Texas, Texas A&M, and LSU, this conference could compete with the SEC for football prominence.

SMU and Houston come over from the American and should fit in nicely as both have programs have a lot of history, especially with the other Texas schools. Being in the SWC should also help put the programs on the track to self-sufficiency. In 2019, the University of Houston [subsidized](#) 64% of its revenues from athletics. By being closer to conference foes (the American has teams from states as far apart as Kansas and Connecticut), Houston and SMU can greatly reduce travel expenses while significantly increasing revenues through renewed rivalries with in-state foes. Of the 10 athletic programs with the most [revenue](#), 4 reside in the SWC as of 2019.

Additionally, if you thought these teams played fast on the gridiron, wait till you see them compete on the track. 8 of the top 25 [ranked](#) men's and 6 of the top 25 [ranked](#) women's track and field teams from 2019 hail from this new SWC.

Side note: Yes, this conference has an odd number of teams (11). Without divisions this really isn't an issue. Adding an under-qualified team like Tulane, Louisiana, or Tulsa wasn't worth getting that number to 12, hence the SWC not Big 12 name.

## Rust Belt

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### Rust Belt Conference

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Penn State, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, Ohio State, Cincinnati, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Indiana, Purdue, Illinois, Northwestern

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There has always been a pretty stark divide between the East and West Division Big Ten teams, so they are finally split up along \*roughly\* the same lines. Additionally, Pitt and West Virginia belong in the same conference. They're practically next door neighbors and it is sad to see that conference realignment has sacrificed the Backyard Brawl for long distance let-downs (WVU is 1500 miles from Texas Tech!). The in-state Penn State-Pitt and Ohio State-Cincinnati rivalries are reignited with conference championship implications. Cincinnati is the UCF of the north and deserves to compete at a high level conference as they've excelled in both basketball and football and proved they can compete on the big [stage](#). The move from the American to the RBC should also greatly reduce travel expenses and could potentially prevent more of their sports programs from being [cut](#).

Lastly, and as an ND student I can say this, NOTRE DAME BELONGS IN A CONFERENCE. However, that conference is not the ACC. Notre Dame is in Big Ten territory, has rivalries with schools like Michigan and Purdue, shares similar academic standards with schools like Northwestern, and can compete on a national level in football with schools like Ohio State. Notre Dame doesn't need to travel to California or South Carolina to face tough competition. It exists in their own backyard. It is also probably in their best interest as they played in their first ever conference championship in 2020 and despite getting blown out, were still selected for the CFP. Had Notre Dame been an independent this year, they most likely would've been passed over.

With a big four of Penn State, Notre Dame, Ohio State, and Michigan the RBC could compete most years with the SEC and SWC for national prominence in football.

## Great Plains

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### Great Plains Conference

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North Dakota State, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa State, Iowa, Kansas, Kansas State, Nebraska, Missouri, Colorado State, Colorado

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So, what do we do with those western Big Ten teams and Northern Big 12 teams? Let's put them together in this new Great Plains Conference. Iowa and Iowa State belong in the same conference, as do Kansas and Missouri. Colorado is brought in from the Pac-12 since that whole experiment didn't quite work out for them. Now, they can renew their rivalries with former Big 12 peers and won't have to travel 1300 miles to do so. Speaking of rivals, we add in the Colorado State Rams. CSU has shown commitment to competing at a higher level, most notably with an impressive new football [stadium](#). They have been trying since 2016 to join a better conference than the MWC and the Great Plains Conference seems like the perfect fit.

The most interesting addition here is North Dakota State. Moving the Bison up from FCS is a no-brainer. They've absolutely dominated the FCS, winning 8 of the last 9 national championships. Talks of a move up to FBS frequently pop up in Fargo, but the main deterrent was always the lack of a conference that made geographic and competitive sense. It may have been tough for the Bison to travel to and compete with titans like Ohio State, Penn State, and Michigan, but NDSU could certainly hold their own in the GPC as they've already [beaten](#) Minnesota, Colorado State, Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State, and Iowa in the past decade.

Overall, this would be a pretty balanced conference across all sports, not just football. Kansas and Wisconsin are perennial basketball powers, while Iowa is on the rise. This conference also has some of the nation's best wrestling schools with 5 schools [ranked](#) in the top 12.

## PAC

Pacific Athletic Conference (Football)
Washington State, Washington, Oregon, Boise State, Utah, BYU, Arizona, Arizona State, California, UCLA, USC, Stanford



Pacific Athletic Conference
Washington State, Washington, Oregon, Boise State, Utah, BYU, Arizona, Arizona State, California, UCLA, USC, Stanford, Gonzaga, San Diego State



The PAC-12 has really struggled over the past few years. The move to add Colorado hasn't really paid off. USC, Oregon, and Stanford have lost national prominence. The best football programs out west no longer reside within the Pac-12. Adding Boise State and BYU to the PAC (What's the need for the number? It seemingly always changes anyway) could help the conference have more national relevance. Both schools bring packed crowds to their games, are located within the conference's boundaries, and can definitely compete. BYU finished ahead of every PAC-12 team in the football rankings this year and Boise State's football program was [ranked](#) higher than every PAC-12 program except for Washington over the past five years going into the 2020 season. The most notable drop is Oregon State which has the third worst football program among Power 5 schools in the past five years and has only made the NCAA basketball tournament once in the past thirty years (yikes). Oregon State will always struggle to compete athletically and financially in the shadow of in-state rival Oregon, which is why I have moved the Beavers out of the PAC which I will discuss later.

San Diego State and Gonzaga have arguably been the most consistent west coast basketball teams over the past decade and are therefore added to the PAC as non-football members. Gonzaga is far too dominant of a program to be beating up on inferior WCC opponents in conference play and the same could be said about SDSU in the Mountain West. Adding these two schools might give east-coasters a reason to stay up for a "Conference of Champions" hoops contest other than trying to hear Bill Walton talk about aliens.

## Big East

Big East Conference (Football)
Boston College, Rutgers, Syracuse, Buffalo, UConn, Army, Navy, UMass, Temple



Pretty much every school north of Clemson, SC and east of State College, PA is a basketball school. This makes it very hard to compile a competitive football conference in the most densely populated region of the country. However, there are a bunch of schools that can compete at the FBS level, but probably not in a major conference. BC and Syracuse haven't had much success in the ACC, the Big Ten experiment has been unsuccessful and costly for Rutgers, UConn and UMass have been developing FBS programs, Temple shouldn't be flying from Philly to Oklahoma for conference games, Buffalo deserves better competition than the MAC, and the Army-Navy game would be a lot more significant if it had conference title implications. Of course, this conference is nowhere near as competitive as the new Power 6 conferences previously mentioned and would be classified as a Group of 3 conference.

Big East Conference
Boston College, Rutgers, Syracuse, Buffalo, UConn, Army, Navy, UMass, Temple, Georgetown, Providence, St. John's, Seton Hall, Rhode Island, Villanova



The strength of the new Big East really comes from basketball. The east coast teams of the old Big East are added to the football schools along with Rhode Island which has developed a great program in the A-10. The Georgetown-Syracuse and UConn-BC rivalries are renewed. In-state rivalries such as BC-UMass, Syracuse-Buffalo, Seton Hall-Rutgers, Temple-Villanova, and Providence-Rhode Island are given new life. However, the real value comes in the resurgence of the Big East conference tournament at MSG. Creighton and Butler have had great basketball teams, but watching teams from Nebraska and Indiana in MSG doesn't hold the same value as watching Syracuse, BC, UConn, Georgetown, Villanova, and others battle each other in the Big Apple like the good ole days.



## Blue Ridge

Blue Ridge Conference

Liberty, Old Dominion, James Madison, Marshall, East Carolina, Charlotte, Coastal Carolina, Appalachian State



These Mid-Atlantic schools are on that FBS-FCS border. App State, Liberty, and Coastal have successfully made that jump. JMU should make that jump. Charlotte and Old Dominion haven't had much success since their jump but can develop in the upcoming years. Marshall has been a solid mid-major. East Carolina was overmatched in the American, but could fair better with more equal peers. Overall, these teams have made, or are trying to make, a commitment to being in the FBS and are best suited alongside similar schools athletically and geographically.

## Gulf Coast

Gulf Coast Conference

South Florida, UAB, Tulane, Tulsa, Louisiana, Troy, Southern Miss, Louisiana Tech



These teams are similar to those in the Blue Ridge Conference. They either outperformed in the Sun Belt or C-USA or the American didn't work quite work out. They're too good for FCS, but nowhere near ready for the SEC. The GCC suits them well and will reduce travel expenses.

## Independent

Hawaii



Lastly, we have an independent Hawaii. I'm usually not a fan of conference-less teams, but Hawaii is unique because of its location. It simply isn't fair to force smaller programs to fly their volleyball team 6 hours to the island to play on a school night. Independent status allows Hawaii to make autonomous decisions and its competitors to take a mid-season vacation if desired. An overall win-win.

## FCS and Non-Football Conferences

### Central Athletic Conference

Central Athletic Conference
Northern Iowa, Butler, Dayton, Loyola-Chicago, Creighton, Saint Louis, Wichita State, DePaul, Marquette, Xavier



The CAC is comprised of some of the best mid-major basketball schools in the Midwest. In their previous conferences, most of these schools had to travel long distances to play teams along the east coast. However, there is enough talent in the central region for that not to be necessary. Top to bottom this will be one of the most competitive conferences for basketball in the country as any of the 10 teams could win the CAC in any given year. This may sound like a stretch, but a CAC conference tournament in Chicago could potentially replicate the magic and prestige of the Big East tournament in MSG.

### Big Sky

Big Sky Conference (Football)
Oregon State, Utah State, Eastern Washington, Idaho, Idaho State, Montana, Montana State, Portland State, Weber State

























Big Sky Conference
Oregon State, Utah State, Eastern Washington, Idaho, Idaho State, Montana, Montana State, Portland State, Weber State, Seattle, Portland, Utah Valley



Oregon State would be better matched in the Big Sky, along with former Mountain West school Utah State. Oregon State was rated the third-worst football program among all major conference teams and the worst in the PAC-12 over the past 5 years. They Beavers have been terrible on the hardwood as well. Since 2002 they have never finished in the top four of the [conference](#), but have finished in the bottom four 12 times. Oregon State has also struggled to compete with in-state rival Oregon both athletically and financially. In 2019, Oregon made \$45 million more in athletic [revenue](#) than the Beavers. In the Big Sky, Oregon State could rely less on the university to subsidize athletics due to decreased costs associated with hiring, recruiting, scholarships, facility upgrades, and travel.

Utah State would also benefit from playing at the FCS level as they've been less than stellar in a weak Mountain West conference. Eastern Washington, Montana, and Montana State have been very successful in FCS and Idaho actually used to compete at the FBS level before deciding that moving [down](#) a level was best for their school. The Big Sky will likely be the one of the top FCS conferences, but none of these programs have the resources or track record to compete in the PAC. By staying in the FCS, these schools can save millions.

## Four Corners

Four Corners Conference (Football)											
New Mexico State, Northern Arizona, Northern Colorado, Nevada, UNLV, Southern Utah, New Mexico, Air Force, UTEP, Wyoming											
											
Four Corners Conference											
New Mexico State, Northern Arizona, Northern Colorado, Nevada, UNLV, Southern Utah, New Mexico, Air Force, UTEP, Wyoming, Grand Canyon, Denver											
											

The Four Corners Conference comprises of former Mountain West teams, independents, a few current FCS teams, and a former Conference USA team in UTEP. Every school benefits from reduced travel and a more even playing field. Those to watch in this conference are Nevada and UNLV. Neither have made the changes or seen the success necessary to join a major conference like the PAC, but development at this level may trigger a PAC invite later down the road. Grand Canyon and Denver don't have D1 football teams, but should add value to the conference in other sports like basketball and lacrosse. Remember, former Louisville coach Rick Pitino [said](#) Grand Canyon was the toughest crowd he had ever faced.

## Sun Belt

### Sun Belt Conference

East Tennessee State, Furman, UNC Greensboro, Wofford, Richmond, Davidson, VCU, Western Kentucky, Middle Tennessee, UNC Wilmington, Belmont, Murray State



### Sun Belt Conference (Football)

East Tennessee State, Furman, Richmond, Davidson, Western Kentucky, Middle Tennessee, Wofford, Murray State



This conference is a collection of teams from Tennessee, Kentucky, southern Virginia, and the Carolinas that have outclassed their respective conference on the hardwood. With so many solid teams in the region, it's no longer necessary for these programs to travel around the country to find competitive conference opponents. Expect this conference to get 3-4 bids in the NCAA tournament each year.

## Golden State

### Golden State Conference - North

Sacramento State, Fresno State, San Jose State, UC Davis, Cal Poly, Pacific, Saint Mary's, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Cal State Bakersfield



### Golden State Conference - South

Pepperdine, Loyola Marymount, San Diego, UC Irvine, Long Beach State, Cal State Northridge, Cal State Fullerton, UC Santa Barbara, UC Riverside



Golden State Conference (Football)
Sacramento State, Fresno State, San Diego State, San Jose State, San Diego, UC Davis



There are so many California schools at the D1 level that compete in a wide variety of different conferences, but are on about the same competitive level across all sports. Therefore, these schools should compete against each other. For basketball and other sports besides football, the conference can be split into two divisions with a single conference tournament. A conference tournament in Sacramento (or the Staples Center in LA) could be pretty exciting and the winner would carry a lot of bragging rights in the state.

As mentioned earlier, San Diego State would compete in basketball in the PAC, but their football team would be relegated to the FCS GSC along with Fresno State and San Jose State due to poor performance in the MWC. They would be joined with the other California FCS football schools.

### MEAC

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (Football)
Delaware State, Howard, Morgan State, Norfolk State, North Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central, South Carolina State



Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference
Delaware State, Howard, Morgan State, Norfolk State, North Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central, South Carolina State, Maryland Eastern Shore, Coppin State



## SWAC

Southwestern Athletic Conference (Football)
Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Alcorn State, Jackson State, Mississippi Valley State, Prairie View A&M, Southern, Texas Southern, Florida A&M



Southwestern Athletic Conference
Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Alcorn State, Jackson State, Mississippi Valley State, Prairie View A&M, Southern, Texas Southern, Florida A&M, Grambling, Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Bethune-Cookman



The HBCU's in the MEAC and SWAC are left largely unchanged. The schools within each conference share a common identity and thus should remain in the same conference. The only change is Florida A&M and Bethune-Cookman to the SWAC, a move already in the [works](#).










## Ivy League

Ivy League
Harvard, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, Brown, Cornell, Princeton, Yale



Not much to say here. The Ivy League works well as currently constructed.







## New England

New England Athletic Conference (Football)
Rhode Island, Colgate, Albany, Holy Cross, Marist, Maine, Central Connecticut, Bryant, New Hampshire
        
New England Athletic Conference
Colgate, Albany, Holy Cross, Marist, Maine, Central Connecticut, Bryant, New Hampshire, Hartford, UMass Lowell, Vermont, Northeastern, Boston University, Quinnipiac, Siena, Binghamton



The NEAC consists of the remaining schools in the New England region. These schools don't have large athletic budgets, so it makes sense to compete against nearby schools. Vermont has dominated the America East in basketball and could make a jump to the Big East with some demonstrated NCAA tournament success in the upcoming years.

## Summit League

Summit League (Football)
Northern Iowa, Drake, Missouri State, North Dakota, South Dakota, South Dakota State
     
Summit League
Drake, Missouri State, North Dakota, South Dakota, South Dakota State, Kansas City, Omaha, Oral Roberts



The Summit League loses ND State in football, but gains Northern Iowa, Drake, and Missouri State. Western Illinois and Denver move on for geographic reasons.

# Sunshine League

Sunshine League (Football)
Jacksonville State, Florida Atlantic, Samford, The Citadel, Charleston Southern, Mercer, Georgia Southern, Georgia State, Stetson, Kennesaw State, FIU



Sunshine League
Jacksonville State, Florida Atlantic, Samford, The Citadel, Charleston Southern, Mercer, Georgia Southern, Georgia State, Stetson, Kennesaw State, FIU, FGCU, Jacksonville, North Florida, College of Charleston



Leftover schools in the southeast, including a few making a drop from FBS to FCS.

## VAC

Valley Athletic Conference
Western Illinois, Illinois State, Indiana State, Southern Illinois, Valpo, Austin Peay, Eastern Illinois, Eastern Kentucky, Morehead State, UT Martin, Tennessee State, Tennessee Tech



The VAC mostly consists of football schools from the old Missouri Valley and Ohio Valley.

## MAC

Mid-American Conference
Akron, Ball State, Bowling Green, Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Kent State, Miami (OH), Northern Illinois, Ohio, Toledo, Western Michigan, Youngstown State



Mid-American Conference (Football)
Akron, Ball State, Bowling Green, Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Kent State, Miami (OH), Northern Illinois, Ohio, Toledo, Western Michigan, Youngstown State, Butler, Dayton, Robert Morris, Duquesne





The MAC downgrades to FCS since they struggle financially at the FBS level, as demonstrated by their move to weekday conference games. They will continue to struggle to compete at this level due to decreasing population growth in the region which will lead to less revenue from tuition and less talent to recruit (especially after the Rust Belt Conference gets their picks of the litter). This move can also put an end to [MAAction](#) which has been very unpopular among coaches, players, and devout fans. The long [overdue](#) addition of Youngstown State is finalized, along with football only additions of Dayton, Butler, Robert Morris, and Duquesne.

## Lonestar

Lonestar Athletic Conference
North Texas, Rice, UTSA, Texas State, Abilene Christian, Houston Baptist, Incarnate Word, Lamar, Sam Houston State, Stephen F. Austin, UTRGV, Texas-Arlington, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi



Lonestar Athletic Conference (Football)
North Texas, Rice, UTSA, Texas State, Abilene Christian, Houston Baptist, Incarnate Word, Lamar, Sam Houston State, Stephen F. Austin



The LAC is a combination of underperforming FBS and solid FCS teams from the state of Texas. Additionally, three Texas schools (UTRGV, UTA, and TAMU-CC) are added as non-football members. The most notable member here is Rice which has suffered a major fall from grace since the glory days in the Southwest Conference.

## Horizon League

Horizon League
Evansville, Bradley, UIC, IUPUI, Northern Kentucky, Purdue Fort Wayne, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Wright State, SIU Edwardsville, Southeast Missouri, Chicago State



The Horizon League stays mostly the same with a few teams leaving for other conferences, a couple joining from the Ohio Valley, and Chicago State leaving the [\\*checks notes\\*](#) Western Athletic Conference?!?! Yes, you heard that right. A team from Chicago struggling with budget [problems](#) was in the same conference as a school from Seattle, but not in the same conference as a school (UIC) a subway ride away. Insanity or stupidity? Pick one.

## Erie

### Erie Athletic League

Robert Morris, Duquesne, St. Bonaventure, Saint Francis (PA), Niagara, Cleveland State, Detroit, Oakland, Canisius



These schools have been quite unimpressive athletically and were somewhat geographically isolated from competitors in their previous conferences. For the sake of everyone, let's keep them locked up together around Lake Erie.

## Delta

### Delta Athletic Conference

Louisiana-Monroe, South Alabama, Central Arkansas, Arkansas State, Southeastern Louisiana, McNeese State, Northwestern State, Nicholls, Little Rock, New Orleans



### Delta Athletic Conference (Football)

Louisiana-Monroe, South Alabama, Central Arkansas, Arkansas State, Southeastern Louisiana, McNeese State, Northwestern State, Nicholls



The DAC consists of schools from Louisiana, Arkansas, and Alabama. Some were underperformers in the Sun Belt and the rest were in the FCS level Southland Conference.

# Colonial

Colonial Athletic Conference
Delaware, Towson, Bucknell, Monmouth, Lafayette, Lehigh, American, Mount St. Mary's, Loyola (MD), George Mason, George Washington, UMBC, La Salle, Saint Joseph's, Rider, Drexel



Colonial Athletic Conference (Football)
Georgetown, Villanova, Delaware, Towson, Bucknell, Monmouth, Lafayette, Lehigh, Sacred Heart, Wagner, Stony Brook, Fordham



The new CAC consists of underperforming mid-majors from the mid-Atlantic states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. For football, Georgetown and Villanova are added as well as four schools from the New York metro area that will play other sports in the Big Apple Conference as will be discussed next.

## Big Apple

Big Apple Conference
Sacred Heart, Wagner, Stony Brook, Fordham, LIU, St. Francis Brooklyn, Hofstra, Saint Peter's, Manhattan, Iona, Fairleigh Dickinson, NJIT, Fairfield



The Big Apple Conference consists only of schools in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. There are so many schools in the metro area, yet they belong to so many different conferences. Much like the Golden State Conference discussed earlier, how cool would it be to have these schools compete in a conference tournament for “King of New York” status and an automatic March Madness bid? Very cool, especially if you’re an AD managing the travel budgets at any of these schools. Say goodbye to mid-week road trips to Missouri or Maine and hello to subway rides across the city.

Big South

Big South Conference
Chattanooga, VMI, Western Carolina, Elon, William & Mary, Campbell, Hampton, Presbyterian, Lipscomb, Gardner-Webb, High Point, Longwood, UNC Asheville, Radford, USC Upstate, Winthrop



Big South Conference (Football)
Chattanooga, VMI, Western Carolina, Elon, William & Mary, Campbell, Hampton, Presbyterian



The final Division I conference is the Big South, consisting of schools in Virginia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas.