

Here is some unsolicited advice to the Big 12. As you might expect coming from me, it's going to be contrary to what everyone else thinks they should do.

With Texas A&M trying to leave the Big 12 (It doesn't happen until the SEC accepts them) every remaining school is trying to decide in the immortal lyrics of The Clash "Should I Stay or Should I Go". The quick answer ?

### **They should stay.**

Why ? The first reason is that the **Super Conferences that are forming or being considered will turn into a huge mistake**. No ifs ands or buts about it. While the concept of a Super Conference sounds incredibly cool, the reality is that the larger than 12 school conferences will only invoke the law of intended consequences and will create the following problems:

#### **1. More schools will NOT mean more TV money.**

The big college TV networks, Fox, ESPN, CBS pay for quality, not quantity. **They need marquee matchups that are "Must Tweet TV"**. The number of schools in a conference actually reduce the parity and quality of match-ups in a conference. The networks will not pay up for that. Adding Texas A&M to the SEC is not going to add a single dollar's worth of value to the owner of the SEC TV contract, regardless of sport. Maybe the SEC has an escalator in their contract that increases the total value of the TV contract, but I'm guessing that it still will result in a reduction in the dollars paid to each school when compared to the amount paid had an additional school not joined the conference.

#### **2. Fans will hate the scheduling impact**

You know how there is midnight madness in college basketball ? And late night and games scheduled at weird times for basketball ? Get ready for morning madness in college football as well. I'm guessing that the only way to get all those games through a single TV network partner is to start very, very early or to go very very late.

OR

to move games to online broadcasts. Which is exactly why the big networks are very supportive of the Super Conferences. They know they will be able to force matchups OFF of tv and on to internet based broadcasts. You can pass your own judgement if that's good or bad.

#### **3. Say Goodbye to Cupcake Football Games**

As a big college football fan I see this as a positive. But if you talk to any coach with BCS aspirations, they will tell you that this is a huge negative. Sure Utah State can take Auburn to the wire every now and then, but the reality is most BCS title aspiration (not all) schools have 3 or 4 cupcake games on their schedule. With every school added to a conference they are going to have to remove a cupcake to make room on their schedule. Coaches are going to HATE this. Of course the smaller schools are going to lose their pay day as well.

#### **4. Goodbye Geographic Rivalry Games**

Growing up in Pittsburgh I absolutely loved the Pitt vs Penn State battles. It didn't matter how bad either team was. I hated the fact that the game disappeared. All those natural rivalries of Texas A&M in and around the state of Texas will be impacted. And as far as new rivalries, it's a long drive for fans from College Station to Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, etc. (Yes I know Arkansas has survived it but it would be interesting to know what their fans think about only playing A&M as a nearby rival and btw, they already play each other).

I don't care how good a game OU vs Oregon could hypothetically be, fans from both sides are going to second guess the economics of going to the games. And if it's an off-year for either team, then what ?

#### **5. Big Dogs Hate Becoming Little Dogs**

In a huge conference a school that was once a "leader" in its conference will inevitably become an also ran. They will be the school that used to get national games that now is relegated to the internet broadcasts or a small coverage regional game. Think recruits might notice that ? Of course they will. Being on the bottom rung of a 12 team conference is bad enough. Being at or near the bottom of a 16 team conference assures television invisibility.

How long will it take before teams that feel like they aren't getting the coverage they need will withdraw from a super conference ? At which point someone else obviously has to take their place at the bottom. Big dogs hate becoming little dogs. It will be just a matter of time before schools withdraw.

### **So What should the Big 12 teams do ? They should stay in the Big 12**

So now let me explain some reasons why I think the Big 12 should stay as is after Texas A&M leaves.

#### **1. The Big12 becomes the AL East of College Football.**

Every year you know that the Yankees and Red Sox are going to battle it out in a unique rivalry where both sides dislike each other. It is one of the most watched match-ups in MLB. Now some might argue it is because of market size. It's not. There are plenty of large market rivalries that don't compare (see Dodgers – Giants). Texas vs OU has the same cachet and regional and national intensity. If either team moves they will have a difficult, if not impossible time replacing the quality of this rivalry. What's more, the remaining teams because of the quality of the programs can quickly evolve into significant rivalries

Going back to my AL East comparison, Tampa Bay has quickly become a rival to both the Yankees and Red Sox. It's not a rivalry of national interest yet, but it can get there. The Big 12 has quality programs that will only grow in significance because it has fewer schools.

More schools in a conference dilutes rivalries if only because in a super conference they may not play each other every year.

#### **2. Money, Money, Money**

Probably the most important reason to stay in a smaller Big 12 is that fewer schools means more money to the conference. The Big 12 is looking at a new TV deal in just a few years. The bidding between Fox, ESPN, CBS and maybe even NBC that has just rebranded Versus as NBC Sports Network could be intense. Will they get less money having lost 3 schools in the past 3 years..... ABSOLUTELY NOT.

They will get just as much money and if they play their cards right, they could get even more ! On a per school basis it could be much, much more.

Their TV partners want quality, marquee games with national significance. That happens with the top 2 to 4 teams in every major conference. It doesn't matter whether your conference has 9. 12. 16 or more members. There are only 20 teams in the Top 20 and 10 in the Top 10. By the 5th game of the season the top teams in the top conferences are getting national attention. Everyone else is just working to become bowl eligible to keep their fans interested. **The TV networks pay the big bucks in order to be able to broadcast the best games between the best teams in the conference.** They don't care about the 5th or lower teams playing each other. Those go regional not national.

### **3. Out of Conference TV Ready Games**

Fewer teams in the conference means more opportunity for out of conference games. They have more opportunities to schedule VERY TV FRIENDLY MATCHUPS with schools from other non super conferences. Could the Oregon vs LSU game yesterday even have been put together if both conferences had 14 schools ? 16 schools ? It's would be very tough. Not the case among the non super conference schools. There will always be compelling matchups available. Which of course the TV networks will love.

### **4. They Can Pay Players Larger Stipends or Start an NFL Like Development Fund**

The Big 12 can take the 20mm, 25mm or whatever the amount that would have gone to Texas A&M and do any of the following or whatever else they can think of :

- a. Do what the NFL does, make it a fund that can be borrowed against to develop or enhance stadiums and practice facilities or for conference wide programs.
- b. Use it for anything that allows the Big 12 to brand itself as a better quality conference for its athletes, fans and TV partners.
- c. Use the additional shares to increase the stipends to athletes across all revenue sports. Think this might help the recruiting of all Big 12 schools ?