

Pac-10: a solution to pressing problems

The Northwest teams caused some flak but two new schools lessen the load

By MIKE MARINO
Emerald Sports Editor

A situation existed not too long ago that was potentially dangerous to the life of the Pacific-8 athletic conference.

Like the scenario for a civil war, this danger was a split between two major regions — north and south. And the south was threatening to succeed.

And as a catalyst, the argument involved money — a force that be-

gins to dominate every sport, from the pro ranks to junior high — and who was getting the short end of the dollar.

The pit of the argument was hard to believe. It began when John McKay, head coach at Southern Cal, griped because his program was losing money. That's right, losing money.

And who was responsible? Among the culprits, Oregon.

McKay's beef—shared by the other California schools—was that

his program was losing money in the Northwest. And so it was. You see, the Trojans would make about one-fifth the money they'd take in at the Coliseum when they had to play in Autzen, Parker, or Martin Stadiums.

"Oregon, Oregon State, and Washington State would come to our place and make \$150,000 when we split the gate receipts," said Trojan Athletic Director Dick Perry. "And then we would go to their place and take home \$30,000. We wanted a deal where there would be

a flat guarantee of, say, \$75,000." Now it doesn't take a magician or a whiz at math to figure out that if two teams at a place like Autzen could only generate \$60,000 in gate money, that a guarantee wouldn't work. Hypothetically, Oregon would end up paying USC to play in Eugene.

Football is the "big-money" sport at most universities, Oregon included. And it couldn't live by paying other schools — while receiving nothing.

The rule that made for the nasty problem was the so-called "home-and-home" or "round robin" rule. Simply, each team in the conference would alternate home sites with the others — one year it's a game in L.A., the next year it's at Eugene.

There appeared no solution. Even Sports Illustrated got into the act, saying in 1975 that "a better Pacific alignment might include USC, UCLA, San Diego State, Cal, Stanford, San Jose State, Washington — and maybe Oregon."

"There was a very real fear," said Oregon president William Boyd. "It's my judgment that if something wasn't done, SC would surely leave, and probably UCLA."

"And I know the regents in California wouldn't have split up Berkeley and UCLA," Boyd added. "I thought that if SC — and surely UCLA and Cal — were to leave, we'd lose the Rose Bowl. And that right now is what sustains us."

One team may play in Pasadena, but all the Pac-8 teams profit from the takings. And that loss would have crippled the Northwest schools — with the exception of Washington.

Why then didn't the conference give the Ducks, Beavers, and Cougars their papers? Because a solution was found.

On July 1, that solution will officially be known as the Pac-10. On that day, the highly regarded programs from the University of Arizona and Arizona State will join the existing eight schools, and in the process solve a lot of problems.

"The revenue potential of the conference was very exponential in the decision," said Commissioner Wiles Hallock. "USC and one or two others made no bones about the fact that their own revenues had to be increased. They were looking for a solution."

What the addition of the Arizona schools does is essentially two-fold. First, it eliminates the home-and-

home rule. Were it still to apply, the rule would mean a mandatory nine conference games — allowing only two regular season games to be scheduled against outside opponents. This would end a lot of traditional inter-conference rivalries.

Instead, teams in the new conference will be required to play a minimum of only seven conference games, a figure that will hike to eight by 1980 or 1981. That kills the round-robin, since some teams won't see each other every year, and will not — in USC's case — have to absorb a big money loss twice every three years.

Second, the Pac-10 will increase the revenues of everyone. It's common knowledge that the Arizona programs are among the most successful in the nation.

For example, the Sun Devils (that's Arizona State, get used to it) are expanding their stadium — site of the annual Fiesta Bowl — from a 55,000 to 75,000 person capacity. "And they'll sell out," Perry confirms.

"Both teams have large followings, and they'll draw a large contingent in our area. And we'll make money on the road."

Feasibly then, you might say that Oregon, Oregon State, and Washington State could continue to grovel and the league would remain intact.

Don't count on that happening. Why? Because some folks, like Cal's AD, Dave Maggard, and Oregon's John Caine feel that there's more than one solution to the problem.

"No problem is insurmountable," Maggard coined. "It's just a matter of how you go about solving it. Sure, the Pac-10 is part of the solution, but only part."

"It's up to each individual school to try and better their programs. We do a lot more fundraising than we used to, and being in a big area (Northern California) we have learned to compete with people in the entertainment field."

"And in places like Eugene," he added, "there's none of that competition. The teams are the only game in town."

That's a situation that has Caine smiling for the future. "We have it all going for us here," he said. "There's a hundred to a hundred-and-fifty thousand people in Eugene-Springfield, and over a quarter of a million in Lane County. All within easy driving distance of Autzen Stadium."

The thing to do then, is make the drive worth it.

"All we have to do is put on an attractive performance," Caine went on. "Whether it's elephants, tigers, or whatever, the fans are looking for some fun. We want to keep people wondering what we're going to do next."

Throw a winning football team in there, and you've got a helluva Saturday afternoon. "And that's what we're doing at this university," Boyd stressed. "I've been here 2½ years and we have a new AD and a new head football coach. Those were moves designed to start something good for Oregon athletics."

Still, an interesting problem remained. A quick look at the facts shows that, for instance, Parker Stadium in Corvallis holds but 27,500 or so. Each of WSU's stadiums (Martin in Pullman, Albi in Spokane) hold under 40,000. And even if they are filled, the gate money will still not equal that of a USC unless the ticket prices are doubled — and that won't happen. USC will still have to go there — even to Autzen and 40,000 — and face small crowds. What, then?

"McKay was really concerned with why they weren't filling those seats," Hallock explained. "In order for an Oregon to generate income they would take games away from home early (like Nebraska or Oklahoma), but it would kill their home potential by coming back from those trips 0-3 or 0-4."

And after statements like "a satisfying 62-7 loss," we all know that feeling. But what do you do then, open with Willamette?

"That's not the answer, although you'd go into the conference season with better morale," Hallock said. "But then you'd likely get a big surprise in the conference."

"The ideal thing is what happened to Washington State this year." The Cougars, of course, opened up at Nebraska and won 19-10 before a profitable crowd of 75,992, then did the same — by a 23-21 score — to Michigan State before over 50,000. They next lost to Kansas before 45,000, but it was close (14-12), and thus they came home and sold out their next couple of home games.

"That's the whole thing," Maggard affirmed. "What you've got to do is rebuild your own place. I really can't be concerned with how an Oregon is doing at the gate. They can go 2-9 and draw better than we can. We've got to compete with the pros."

With everything rosy, it seems like all the Pac-10 schools can look forward to July 1. But strangely enough, most aren't, for the reason that that also happens to be the compliance date for Title IX, the "equal funding for women's sports" law.

The courts have said, "it shouldn't be a problem, just do it," while the women have said, "it better not be a problem." And there is no doubt that, fundamentally, it's a good law.

But still, it is a problem — and a big one.

"Right now July 1 is the compliance date, but no one is sure what the HEW people mean by compliance," Hallock asserted. "Who will suffer? As far as grants-in-aid go, there may be no longer a 'full' grant. And for the non-revenue sports in the Pac-10, there may be none at all."

Which shows who is going to pay through the nose — the non-revenue sports. Baseball, swimming, and in most cases (Oregon excluded, to an extent) track and gymnastics are all going to suffer severe if not total cutbacks.

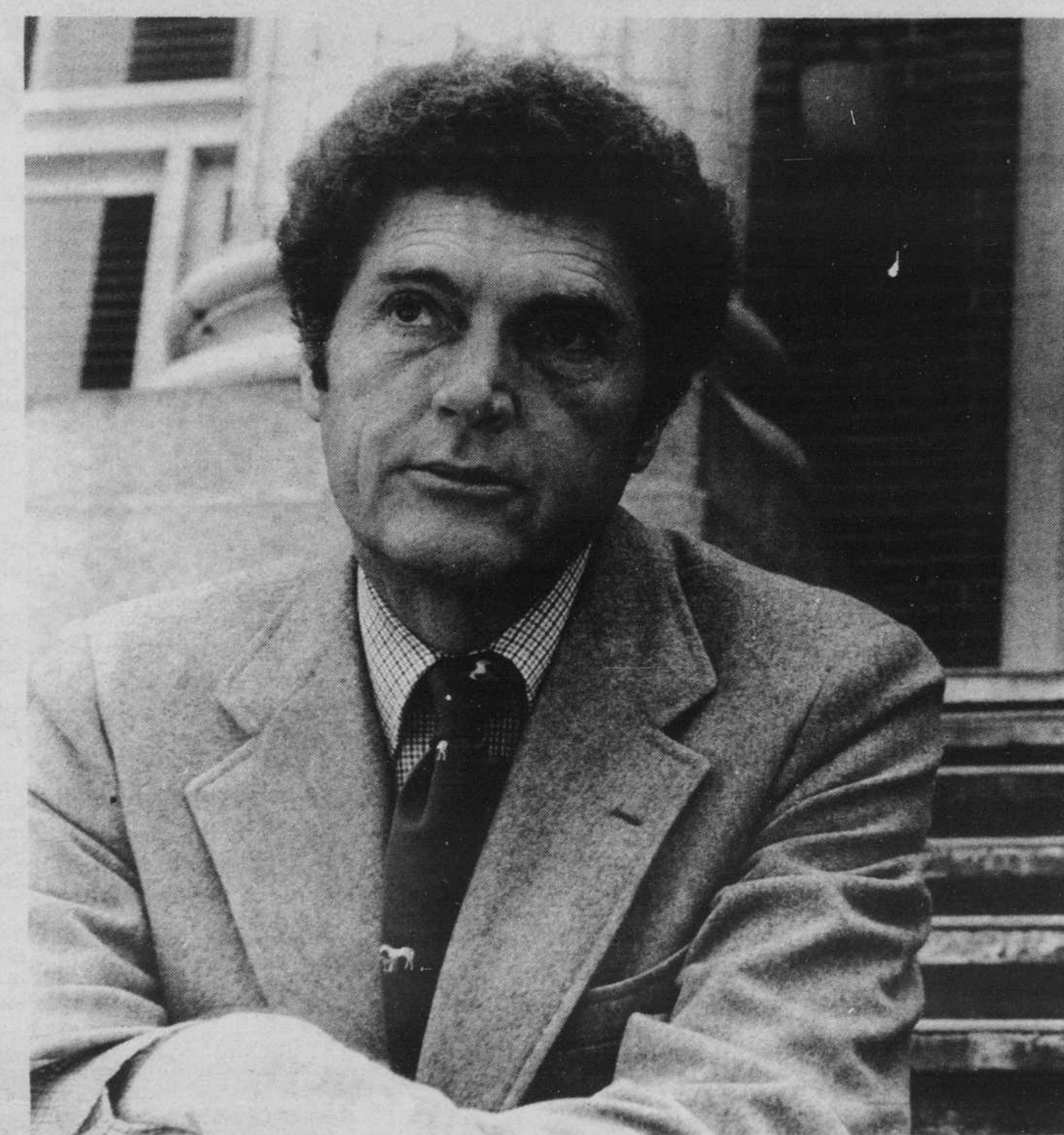
"If we have to find the money, it will come from the men," Boyd stressed. "I will not put a single dollar of the University's general budget in the compliance. And it'll hurt some more than others."

"We'll have some lopsided things. For instance, this community has indicated recently — although it's been down somewhat this year — that it has an interest for gymnastics. That emphasis we'll keep. Others we might not."

Some find USC and UCLA in a different boat. They are known to draw well in track, to draw well in swimming, to draw well in baseball — and even fair in gymnastics. And even though those sports are not competed in a continual conference rotation, come the conference meets or playoffs, those schools will dominate.

"Whatever it is, the problem will balance, because people forget that we have to comply, too," Perry defended. "We are all confronted with things, and we are all working towards the compliance date."

"The (non-revenue) programs may suffer a bit, yes, but we're making every effort to keep them competitive. And there's no reason why we shouldn't have successful women's programs. We'll all just



Emerald Photo

University President William Boyd felt there was a "very real danger" of teams like USC leaving the Pac-8, but with the new scheme in the conference things look better for Northwest schools.

try to keep the conference competitive by letting them all grow — not at the expense of other sports."

But for the Pac-10, Caine puts the money problems into a nutshell. "In the long run," he says, "it comes down to football."

A quick glance at the conference indicates that it just might work itself out. Bill Walsh decided to stay at Stanford, turning down the head job with the L.A. Rams. WSU seems pleased with their new head guy, Jim Walden. After four years and four different coaches, it looks like they found someone who'll stay.

And Oregon, well that program speaks for itself. "I have the impression that Brooks is pleased with what he's doing," Boyd stated. "We're building a football program with what I think are very definite prospects."

"Washington State proved what they can do," he added. "And if you can build a program in Pullman,

Washington, then you can do it anywhere."

All would agree. As they'd also say that the makeup of the Pac-10 will be the best in the country. "Given all the problems today, if any conference in the country makes it, then the Pac-10 will," Hallock professed. "The revenue potential is so great, and each area has natural rivalries (like Oregon-OSU, Stanford-Cal, USC-UCLA, etc.)."

Also, the conference is made up of some of the soundest schools —

academically — in the country. That helps the image.

"For the moment, the major issues seem to be at rest," Boyd said. "These are all fine schools, and right now we're in an 'aura of good feelings' after the crisis. I think what we've arrived at is the ideal solution."

"Besides," he smiled, "it means we don't have to play SC every year."

And that's one less fear to worry about.

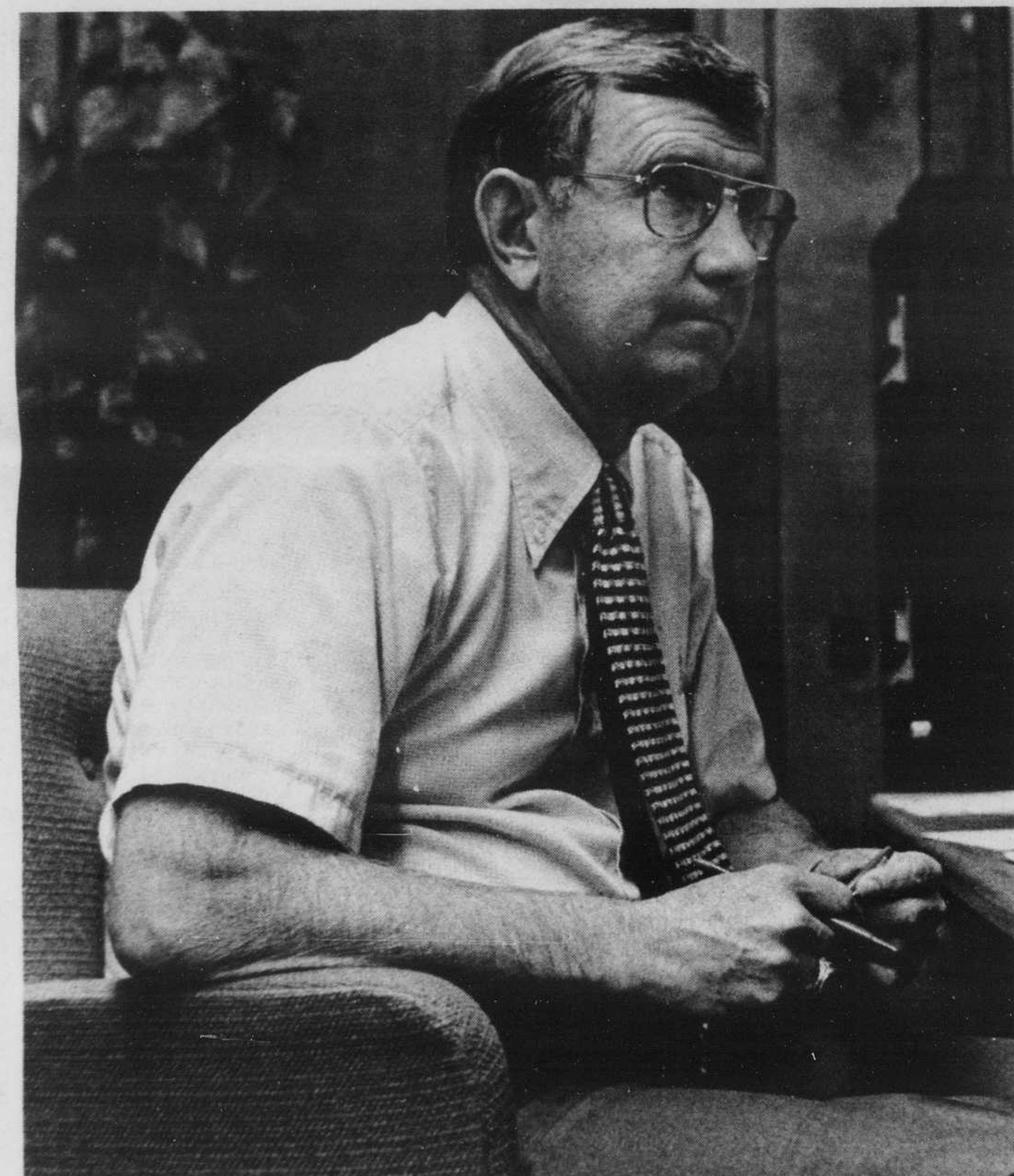


Photo by Steve Scheider

Athletic Director John Caine feels that the drawing potential of the Lane County area alone will be enough to keep the Ducks going in the new Pac-10.

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