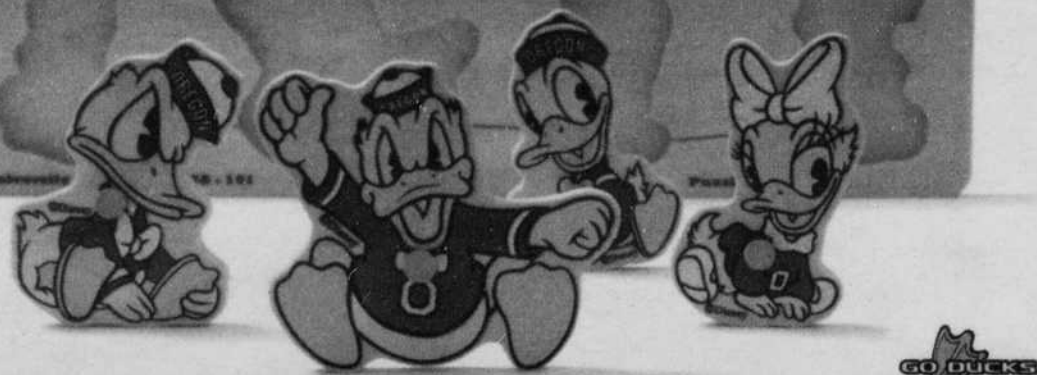


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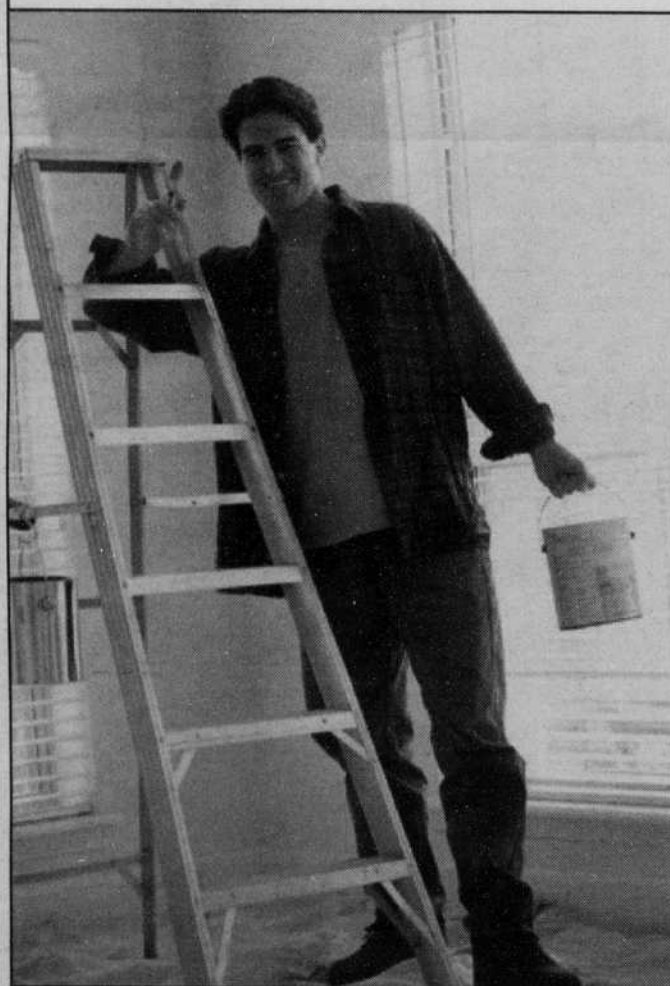


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Fighting Irish sought by two conferences

The Big East and ACC want to land Notre Dame as a conference member

By Craig Barnes
South Florida Sun-Sentinel (KRT)

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Big East Conference presidents will meet Nov. 4 and vote on a final reorganization plan for the conference, and it is the deadline for Notre Dame to make its intentions clear.

With that in mind, the Atlantic Coast Conference has re-opened exploratory conversations with the Irish to see if there is a scenario that is acceptable to both sides that would allow the school to become the conference's 12th team.

The ACC's Council of Presidents held a conference call Friday and discussed the Notre Dame situation. The members participating in the call endorsed conversations with the Irish.

"The Olympic sports are important to Notre Dame, and the ACC provides a stable home for them," one source said, "but resolution of the football question is the biggest issue. Notre Dame wants to remain independent, and the ACC wants full participation membership. There may or may not be a resolution. That's what the conversations are about."

The first contact between the ACC and Notre Dame occurred over a year ago. Notre Dame closely monitored the recent ACC expansion. Notre Dame has an exclusive contract with NBC that pays the Irish more than \$8 million annually to televise its home games.

The money and Notre Dame's commitment to a national schedule are obstacles to a compromise. Notre Dame needs schedule space for Southern California, Michigan, Purdue, the military academies and perhaps Michigan State and Boston College.

Several scenarios are under consideration. One would have the Irish join the ACC in all sports but football, with the conference having the right

of first refusal if Notre Dame decided to abandon its independent football status in the future.

The Irish also could agree to play four or five ACC games, not qualify for the league championship and retain all of its football money while agreeing to get no share of the ACC's basketball money.

If Notre Dame would agree to play six ACC games, the league could reduce the number of conference games needed to qualify for the championship game from eight to six, making Notre Dame a full-participating member and leaving the distribution of money to be resolved.

The ACC's petition to the NCAA for a championship game in 2004 with only 11 teams was informally rejected by the championship committee, increasing the urgency for the conference to get a 12th team. A final decision is not expected on the proposal until April.

Notre Dame is adding 64 scholarships to its non-revenue sports programs over the next four years, but in an effort to find them a home, Athletic Director Kevin White would like to leave football out of the equation.

In the Big East reorganization, Notre Dame, Villanova, St. John's, Georgetown, Seton Hall, Providence, DePaul and Marquette would be basketball-only schools. Louisville, Cincinnati, West Virginia, Pittsburgh, Rutgers, Syracuse, Boston College and perhaps UCF or USF would play football. Central Florida or South Florida would play only football.

When the new Bowl Championship Series contract is instituted in 2007, Notre Dame's situation won't change much. The Irish automatically qualify with nine victories. It could lose the "automatic" status, but as one bowl source said, "Who wouldn't take Notre Dame with nine wins?"

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COACH

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first time since 1998.

"He's a real player's coach," Kegel told The Daily Evergreen earlier this season. "We're really excited about playing for him, busting ass for him. The future holds good things for the team with him in control."

Through the speculation and turmoil that surrounded Price in his short stint at Alabama, he is now very aware that this is Doba's team although he did attend the Washington State game against New Mexico and spent time in the locker room.

"Before I did anything, I wanted to make sure this was Bill's team," Price told The Spokesman-Review on Tuesday. "I don't want to be a distraction. I wanted to make sure the players were 100 percent behind Bill."

The players remain behind their new coach as nothing appears to have changed from Washington State's winning ways of last season. And now

in the head coaching position, Doba is more aware of the increased impact he has on his players' lives, as opposed to when he was an assistant.

"You're the dean of boys, you've got to be careful," Doba said.

Doba has experienced challenges through the start of the season, including maintaining confidence in his decisions. But Washington State's 30th head football coach has been able to enjoy some peace and quiet. As Doba said, "it's a lot quieter on the offensive side."

Now, 25 years after being in the assistant spot, Doba is clearly remembering what it takes to lead a team and has his players and the former coach behind him.

After nearly four decades since becoming a head coach for the first time, Doba isn't teaching math anymore. He's teaching what it takes to return to the Rose Bowl, and that's winning.

Contact the sports reporter at jessethomas@dailyemerald.com.

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