

Pac-12 on the brink of splitting apart

Big Ten votes to add USC, UCLA as new members starting in 2024

By RALPH D. RUSSO and ERIC OLSON
The Associated Press

ROSEMONT, Ill. — In a surprising and seismic shift in college athletics, the Big Ten voted Thursday to add Southern California and UCLA as conference members beginning in 2024.

The expansion to 16 teams will happen after the Pac-12's current media rights contracts with Fox and ESPN expire and make the Big Ten the first conference to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The announcement, which caught the Pac-12 off-guard, came almost a year after Oklahoma and Texas formally accepted invitations to join the Southeastern Conference in July 2025.

Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said USC and UCLA, both members of the Pac-12 and its previous iterations for nearly a century, submitted applications for membership and the league's Council of Presidents and Chancellors voted unanimously to add the Los Angeles schools.

"Ultimately, the Big Ten is the best home for USC and Trojan athletics as we move into the new world of collegiate sports," USC athletic director Mike Bohn said. "We are excited that



UCLA quarterback Dorian Thompson-Robinson, right, runs the ball in for a touchdown as Southern Cal linebacker Ralen Goforth defends on Nov. 20, 2021, in Los Angeles. The two schools will move to the Big Ten in 2024, dealing a major blow to the Pac-12.

Mark J. Terrill/The Associated Press, File

our values align with the league's member institutions. We also will benefit from the stability and strength of the conference; the athletic caliber of Big Ten institutions; the increased visibility, exposure, and resources the conference will bring our student-athletes and programs; and the ability to expand engagement with our passionate alumni nationwide."

The Big Ten is building on previous expansion into the nation's largest media markets, and the move allows the conference to

keep pace with the SEC as one of the most powerful entities in college sports.

The Big Ten will gain blueblood programs in football (USC) and basketball (UCLA) and big-name brands that will enhance the value of the conference's new media rights package currently being negotiated.

Losing flagship schools like USC and UCLA is a major blow to the Pac-12, which has had a long and amicable relationship with the Big Ten best exemplified by its Rose Bowl partnership.

"While we are extremely surprised and disappointed by the news coming out of UCLA and USC today, we have a long and storied history in athletics, academics, and leadership in supporting student-athletes that we're confident will continue to thrive and grow into the future," the Pac-12 said in a statement.

The Pac-12's next move is unknown, but adding schools to replace USC and UCLA is a possibility.

"We look forward to partnering with current and potential members to

pioneer the future of college athletics together," the Pac-12 said.

The Big Ten has expanded twice in recent years, with Nebraska joining in 2011 and Maryland and Rutgers in 2014.

USC and UCLA fit the Big Ten's academic profile. Both schools are among the 65 members of the Association of American Universities, which is made up of top research universities. All Big Ten schools except Nebraska are members.

"From increased exposure and a broader national

platform for our student-athletes, to enhanced resources for our teams, this move will help preserve the legacy of UCLA Athletics for generations to come," UCLA athletic director Martin Jarmond said.

"We have deeply valued our membership in the Pac-12, and we have great respect for the conference and our fellow member institutions, but each school faces its own unique challenges and circumstances. We believe this is the right move for UCLA at the right time."

USC and UCLA stand to significantly increase their revenues. The Pac-12 distributed only \$19.8 million per school in fiscal year 2021, by far the least among Power 5 conferences. The Big Ten's per-school distribution was \$46.1 million, second only to the SEC's \$54.6 million.

The Pac-12 has had difficulty getting its conference television network untracked while the Big Ten Network is the most established of the conference networks.

USC and UCLA would be taking a step up in football, both in visibility and competition.

"Pac-12 After Dark" televised games that kick off in the middle to late evenings in most of the country have made it difficult for the conference to get exposure. The Pac-12 has had teams in the College Football Playoff just twice — Oregon (2014 season) and Washington (2016).

Outlaws earn five state softball nods

By RONALD BOND
For The Observer

ENTERPRISE — Five members of the Wallowa Valley softball team received recognition at the all-state level after helping the Outlaws to a 20-win season and a spot in the Class 3A state quarterfinals.

Leading the way in the all-state awards was sophomore Sophie Moeller, who was honored as a second-team infielder. Moeller, the team's primary leadoff hitter, posted a .474 batting average in league play with a home run, 12 RBIs and 20 runs scored.

Making the third team as an infielder was Cooper Nave. Nave, also a sophomore, hit .559 with three home runs, 15 RBIs and 15 runs scored. She hit all three of her home runs in league play in one day during a doubleheader sweep of Nyssa.

Three additional players, including two senior leaders for Wallowa Valley, earned honorable mention. Rilyn Kirkland, the Outlaws' catcher, hit .537 in league and belted two home runs, scored 20 times and tallied 25 RBIs.

Aimee Meyers, as an infielder, was also tabbed honorable mention. In league, the sophomore hit .531 with 13 RBIs and 15 runs scored.

And in the pitcher's circle, senior Liz Rowley posted a strong season, especially in league play. Rowley finished league play with a record of 6-1 and an ERA of 1.44. She allowed just 18 hits in 39 innings, walked 15 batters and struck out 61.

The five players were instrumental in the Outlaws completing one of the best seasons in the last decade. Wallowa Valley posted an overall record of 20-8, including 10-2 in league play, and won the program's first playoff game since 2014 with a 9-7 opening-round win over Dayton. The team recorded eight shutouts and half of its eight losses were to the teams who met in the 3A state title game — Burns and Yamhill Carlton.

Former Imbler standout named a scholar athlete

By RONALD BOND
For The Observer

PERU, Neb. — A former Imbler volleyball standout was recently named a Heart of America Athletic Conference scholar athlete.

Haley VanLeuven, a Peru State College volleyball player, was among 45 student-athletes from the Nebraska college and more than 1,000 HAAC athletes to be recognized.

Athletes had to meet the following criteria to be eligible:

- Maintain a 3.4 GPA
- Have at least 60 credit hours of schooling completed and five semesters, including at least two from the school they were

nominated from

- Have documentation of being a student-athlete in the sport they are nominated for.

VanLeuven, a senior studying pre-dental hygiene, was among seven members of the Bobcats volleyball team to earn recognition.

The outside hitter, who in high school was an integral part of an Imbler team that was the 2A state runner-up in 2016, played in 21 matches during her senior campaign for the Bobcats, an NAIA program that went 5-28 in 2021-22. She finished the season with 79 kills, 22 digs and 15 blocks. Twice in a match she reached 10 kills, including a high of 13 during a five-set victory over Southwestern in the team's third match of the season.



VanLeuven

People with HIV are our neighbors.

More than half of Oregonians with HIV live outside Portland, often in suburbs or small towns like this one.

But with today's advances, HIV isn't what it used to be. People with HIV are living longer, healthier lives, with the help of medication. By talking about HIV, we can support our community. Testing and early treatment protect you and your partner. Help is available if you're HIV+.

Learn more and find free testing at endhivoregon.org

