

COLLEGE FOOTBALL Could potential Texas/Oklahoma move tip realignment dominos?

BY RALPH D. RUSSO

AP College Football Writer INDIANAPOLIS — Barry Alvarez lived through the tidal wave of conference realignment that swept over college sports in the early 2010s as Wisconsin's athletic director, watching the Big Ten grow to 14 teams from the Midwest to the East Coast. Another round of shuffling could be on the horizon, with Texas and Oklahoma initiating discussions with the Southeastern Conference about leaving the Big 12 and joining what is already college football's strongest league. Alvarez's reaction when he heard the news: "Why?" One day after word of the discussions surfaced, the ripple effects across the sport were clear as schools far from the Big 12 and SEC tried to sort out where this is going. The Big 12 had a meeting planned for late Thursday with athletic directors and university

presidents and chancellors to be briefed on what's going on with Texas and Oklahoma, a person familiar with the meeting told The Associated Press. It was not clear if Texas and



Five conference after it added TCU and West Virginia.

Back when that was playing out, conferences were reacting to one another. The Big Ten pushed over the first domino when it announced in 2009 it was going to explore expansion. Eventually, it lured Nebraska away from the Big 12. "We often talk about how uncomfortable this time is," new Nebraska AD Trev Alberts said. "It is. It's a changing environment. There's a lot of stress. Now's the time you want to be part of some stability." Big 12 schools — as he opened football media days at Lucas Oil Stadium.

Warren stayed away from speculating, calling the news just another example of the vol-

Oklahoma officials would participate, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because the Big 12 was not making its actions public.

Leaders from other conferences were hesitant to speculate on what's next, but some observers were concerned about the potential consequences.

"College football is filled with people operating in silos and what they fail to realize is that if they only look at and try to build their silo as big and as shiny as possible than the entirety of the sport is not going to be as strong as it needs to be," said former Colorado quarterback Joel Klatt, the lead college football analyst for Fox, which holds television rights with the Big 12, Big Ten and Pac-12. LM Otero/AP

Oklahoma head football coach Lincoln Riley speaks from the stage with mannequins in the background during Big 12 media days July 14 in Arlington, Texas.

"I think a move like this would be to the detriment of the sport overall."

Former Oklahoma quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield put it more starkly: "It would ruin the Big 12. It would be done," Mayfield said during a break in shooting TV commercials in Cleveland.

The Big 12 was thought to be on life support about a decade ago after losing Nebraska, Colorado, Texas A&M and Missouri. Managing to hold on to Texas and Oklahoma allowed the Big 12 to survive as a Power That Big Ten expansion sparked a frenzy, with conferences and schools fending for themselves. Could a Texas/ Oklahoma move to the SEC be the next fire starter?

Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren was asked about the talks and whether they could prompt the conference to look at expansion —- maybe even reaching out to the two atility sweeping through college sports at the moment. "That's the world that we live

"That's the world that we live in right now," he said. "From where we sit, we're always constantly evaluating what's in the best interest of the conference."

Atlantic Coast Conference Commissioner Jim Phillips, who took over earlier this year after being athletic director at Northwestern, took a similarly cautious approach.

"I think it's critically important for all of us to always be paying attention to what's happening in the landscape and understanding what's happening across the country, whether you're a conference commissioner, whether you're an athletic director, whether you're a president," he said.

Protest

Continued from B3

"The report provides no information on racial/ethnic demographics or insights into the research instrument used and steps taken to strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the data," the letter said.

The largest cross-section of the 3,547 athletes surveyed came from China (14%), where protests were overwhelmingly frowned upon by those who answered the questions. U.S. athletes were the second-largest contingent to answer (7%), followed by athletes from Japan (6%).

Among the others to sign the letter were fencer Race Imboden, who, along with Berry, was placed on probation by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee for demonstrating on the medals stand at the Pan American Games in 2019. The USOPC later changed its stance and will not sanction athletes who "We do not believe the changes made (to the Olympic protest rule) reflect a commitment to freedom of expression as a fundamental human right nor to racial and social justice in global sports. Staying neutral means staying silent, and staying silent means supporting ongoing injustice."

— Excerpt from letter urging the IOC not to punish participants who demonstrate at the Tokyo Games

protest in Tokyo. Also signing was Harry Edwards, the longtime activist who organized the Olympic Project for Human Rights, which led to the gestures in Mexico City by Smith and Carlos.



Tony Avelar/AP file

John Carlos, left, and Tommie Smith in front of a statue that honors their iconic, black-gloved protest at the 1968 Olympic Games, on the campus of San Jose State University in 2018.

Sounds

Continued from B3

Solomon noted that during breaststroke races in swimming, fans whistle during the races. Layering that in would be over the top. Most venues will run some sort of sound tracks to simulate crowd murmur or presence, but only to prevent total silence and for competitive reasons.

"We've pivoted to know that we've got access to all of these fields-of-play microphones. So, we really feel like we can enhance the sounds of the Games. But you will also hear any crowd presence that is actually being injected into the venue. You'll hear it as the athletes hear it," she said.

Terry Gannon, who will be broadcasting gymnastics, said not having a crowd will also call for some changes into how announcers call events.

"There are certain things you do as an announcer because you play off and wait for the crowd. Now you don't have the crowd and you're probably going to have to come in right away," he said.

With friends and family unable to watch in the venues, NBC is deploying production teams throughout the country to catch their reactions. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee has set up a base at Universal Resorts in Orlando, Florida.

Other broadcasters are taking a different approach. Australia's Seven Network says it plans to layer in crowd noise because it gives fans a level of familiarity.

"We will be using crowd effects in our Olympic Games coverage purely to enhance the viewer experience, said Lewis Martin, Seven's head of network sport. "These effects have been successfully refined in our coverage of the AFL (Australian Rules Football) over the past 18 months, when we have worked tirelessly to meet the feedback of our viewers, whose primary expectation is simply that the contest they're watching sounds and looks like the sport they know and love."