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COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG

STATE OF THE CONFERENCE ADDRESS

PETER IRWIN: We would like to introduce the commissioner of the Big 12 Athletic Conference, Kevin Weiberg, who is going to make his Commissioner State Of The Conference Address. After Commissioner Kevin Weiberg has completed his address, we'll take questions from the floor.

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: Thank you very much, Peter, and good afternoon everybody. I must say that annually I enjoy doing this, but I don't know that I really view it as a state of the conference address necessarily. What I'd like to do in this session is to share with you some things that are going on in the conference office and the conference generally as we head into the football season. And then, of course, to take your questions.

And so I am going to run through some comments here about some items generally regarding the conference and then I'll open it up for your questions.

So with that, let me say that I'm very much looking forward to another great year for Big 12 football. I'm excited about the prospects of the season. I think we are in a very good competitive position as a conference and a sport. We're coming off a National Championship year. It's the fifth time in six years that we've had teams playing for the National Championship in BCS structures. And certainly we've had great success in terms of accessing the National Championship game.

We're coming off a very strong Bowl performance generally, and I think that each of our teams that participated in the Bowl structure last year benefited from that experience, and I think it can be very good, positive in terms of the continued improvement of those programs as we head into this year.

We really do have quality depth of teams from my perspective, and that cuts across both of our divisions. And I think this is going to be one of our best years in many respects in terms of just the quality, depth of competition in our conference. That may prove problematic in terms of accessing championship games, I don't know. We'll see how that goes.

But I am pleased with what I see in terms of generally improving depth of strength in our conference. I certainly think we're going to have teams in the National Championship hunt again this year. We'll see how that goes. The college football regular season is always full of twists and turns and surprises.

But, again, I think that this year in many respects is one from a competitive standpoint that I don't really see a lot of change for our conference. I think we're in a very good competitive position.

But I do think there's going to be some changes in other ways, and I wanted to outline a few of those things for you today. First of all, you all know that the BCS structure is changing in terms of there being five games in that structure now and two additional playing opportunities as a result of those adjustments that have been made in the system, including new access rules that have been put in place.

And I think we'll have to see what impact that has in terms not only of the success of that structure, but also our ability to access second team opportunities in the BCS Bowl games. I think it's reasonable to say that we expect that that prospect may be enhanced as a result of the new playing opportunities. But we'll have to see how that goes.

I think there are a lot of questions there, I know, about issues like double hosting, but I'm very confident in the fact that we have our very good partners in the folks at the Fiesta Bowl hosting the double-hosting situation in this first year, the regular Fiesta Bowl and the National Championship game a week later. And also the Insight Bowl which we're pleased to be connected with. So we would love to have that Phoenix trifecta, I guess, into the season, and we'll see how

things go in that regard.

In terms of our regular Bowl lineup, we are very pleased that we've been able, as we enter into new four-year Bowl agreements, to sustain the core of that Bowl lineup in the Cotton, Holiday and Alamo Bowls. It was important we maintain those great playing opportunities, but we think we've also strengthened our overall Bowl situation by the addition of the Gator and Sun Bowl to our lineup. We'll have two appearances in the Gator Bowl and the Sun Bowl in the new four-year cycle.

And as I've said, we've reconnected with the Insight Bowl in Phoenix and very much look forward to being part of that, a very high quality game. And of course we've maintained an opportunity for the Independence Bowl for our teams. And even though it took a little bit of extra work here in the spring and summer, we have maintained the Houston opportunity in terms of a Bowl game, and we think that can be very helpful to our membership as well.

So we have eight guaranteed Bowl positions. We have quality destinations, quality opponents, and I think quality national exposure as a result of those opportunities.

So while some of that is the same, there are some changes in regard to our Bowl lineup. We also have some personnel changes that I wanted to mention today. And you're aware of some of these. But let me go back through them again.

Walt Anderson has been added to our staff as supervisor of football officials, replacing Tim Millis, who moved on to be the head of the NFL Referee's Association. Tim did an outstanding job of building a quality foundation for our officiating program in its first ten years under the Big 12 umbrella, and we're very excited about having Walt on board. He brings a wealth of experience in terms of on-field officiating, but also in terms of training officials. And I have to tell you I've not met a guy that's more passionate about officiating and the quality of it and the improvement of it than Walt Anderson.

So we're very pleased to have him joining our staff, and I think he'll do a great job for us.

Donnie Duncan's role will change with the conference. I wanted to be sure you all knew about that. Donnie is going to refine his focus, I guess we'd say, a little bit with the conference office. And really make it primarily one associated with directing our football championship game. Donnie has provided such great service to the

conference over its first decade, and I'm pleased that we've been able to structure something here that works for him and giving him a little more free time to be able to do things that are important to him and including being part of the lives of those two great-granddaughters I know he's so proud of.

So we're happy that we've been able to structure something that keeps Donnie involved in the day-to-day operation of our football championship game annually. He'll be available to consult with us in a number of fronts and be actively involved.

But we'll be moving out of his role as associate commissioner for football. And that created an opportunity for us to fill a spot that we've been needing to fill in terms of an assistant commissioner that will have both football responsibilities but also responsibilities generally for student services in our office.

And we are in that search process now, hope to have somebody on board before the summer is over in that regard. So that person will really take on the responsibility for the primary liaison with our football coaches and a lot of the day-to-day regular season and Bowl-related activities, the management of the contracts related to Bowls and things of that kind.

But also will play a role in terms of interacting with our campuses on student athlete academic issues. In one way to think of it, it's a little bit of a combination of the things that Donnie has done for us over the years, but also a lot of the role that Prentice Gautt played for the conference prior to his passing a little over a year ago.

So we're pleased to be able to move forward with getting that position hired, and, as I said, hope to have that done before the summer is out. Football is really a team effort for our office. So we have virtually all of our staff involved in somewhat, including Tim Allen on the television side. Dan Beebe who does a lot for us, contract administration and other things. Bob Burda on the media side, of course. John Underwood who does a lot for us in game management, even though he's primarily our basketball guy. So it's really a team effort for us with all of our staff. And rightfully so. It's a sport of great importance to the conference on a number number of fronts.

I think I'd also be remiss if I don't acknowledge and mention Bo Carter for a minute. Bo has decided to move on from the conference office and pursue other opportunities. And I think

all of you who have worked with Bo over the years know what great service he's provided to college sports generally. But also to all of you in the media. And we wish him the best as he moves on into other opportunities. He will be continuing to do some consulting work for us through the course of the football season, but he's also going to be out there actively looking for new opportunities.

This off-season has been an opportunity for us also to focus a lot of attention on game management issues, and even though those of you were in Colorado Springs at our spring meetings covered some of these aspects, I thought it was important that I at least mention to you some things that are going on in that area so that you kind of get a sense of the full breadth of a lot of the things we've worked on in this off-season.

First of all, we'll be conducting an awareness campaign this season, both inside our stadiums and generally regarding fan behavior. And in particular it is our hope that we can continue to make progress to eliminate the sometimes occurrence of fans rushing the field in football.

So we've spent a fair amount of time talking about ways to reach out and trying to make sure student groups and fans generally are aware of our desire for them to remain in the stands. Certainly passionately support the teams, but to do it from that location. And we will be using coaches as well as student athletes and some video messaging that will go inside our stadiums that will go to that issue. And we'll do some direct outreach to the students from the conference office as part of the effort.

We'll continue our effort to share best practices among our schools in terms of those institutions that seem to have more success perhaps in avoiding those kinds of situations with fans occasionally rushing the field.

We also now have in place requirements of our institutions regarding having a plan in place should those kinds of unfortunate incidents occur, really those things directed primarily at the protection of the team members, the support personnel that are on the field, our game officials. And we also have an obligation in place that there be appropriate video monitoring systems at our stadiums so that fan areas can be observed. And in the event we have a situation involving a post-game celebration, that those involved in such a celebration will have that tape reviewed for

purposes of possibly being included in the university judicial process.

So we want fans to understand that the place for them to be is in the stands, not on the field, and we're continuing to put a focus on some of those kinds of things.

We've also formalized procedures relative to game day communication, including making sure that our game officials know the location of game management personnel in the event we do have an incident inside a game.

And we have now more formal procedure to make sure that that kind of communication exists in the pregame situation.

We also have worked with our institutions to enhance security, particularly in areas around our visiting team bench areas.

Our conference members have also adopted a procedure to remove bands from behind visiting team bench areas. We have a sort of best-efforts obligation on the part of members in 2006 to do that and a firm conference requirement that bands be moved from behind those locations by the start of the 2007 season.

We've also worked with our institutions to strengthen policies relative to reentry to our facilities. We think that from a conference office standpoint the best practice in this area is not to permit fans from leaving the stadium except for perhaps a medical emergency or something like that, once they have entered. However, some institutions do permit that practice and what we're requiring of them now is that their security and screening process for people that reenter be the same as those who initially enter the stadium, and we think that's an important provision as well.

So there have been a number of things going on in this area through the course of this off-season. As I said earlier, we want fans and students to passionately support their teams. We want our environments to be fun environments as they've traditionally been, and at the same time we have concern about the safety of participants as well as spectators. And it's an ongoing area of focus for us.

In closing, I think this is going to be another very busy and active year for us. We're very excited about launching the second decade of the Big 12. There are two important areas that will require a lot of our work at the conference level and among our members this season. We will be preparing for a television negotiation that will occur

in the spring or summer of 2007, and we also will be engaging in a process here very soon to review championship sites again for 2008, '9 and beyond. We have championship sites for football, men's and women's basketball set through the 2007-'8 academic year. And I imagine that process to review future sites will likely begin in the winter, early 2007.

So with that, Peter, I think I'll open it up for questions.

PETER IRWIN: Okay. Randy, we'll start with you.

Q. Kevin, what are your thoughts about the possibility of the Cotton Bowl moving out of (inaudible)?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: Well, I think that's a matter, obviously, that Rick Baker and his board and organization is going to have to think through carefully and analyze, and I know he'll do a great job of that.

You know, we have not structured anything in our agreement with the Cotton Bowl that requires a definite location for the Cotton Bowl game in the new four-year period.

So we have a provision in place that allows that game to be played in the Cotton Bowl. And if there's a desire for the Cotton Bowl to think about a different location, you know, we're not going to stand in the way of that possibility. But I really think that's a matter that has to be considered by the Bowl and its board and I know they'll walk through that process.

Q. Kevin, can you talk about what the Big 12 is looking for in its new television contract and maybe the effect of the Big 10 entering its own network deal and how that may affect what you guys look for?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: Well, for us, it's obviously going to be a very important area for us. What we have is our current agreement with ABC/ESPN coming up for renewal. We have this season and one more remaining one. So we don't have all of our television rights up for renewal.

Our contract with Fox Sports or Cable Football and other championship events and women's basketball continues on for several more years. So unlike the Big 10 situation where you've had all of its rights coming due I think after one more year, our situation is a little bit different. We're going to be taking a look at all options as we

review the possibilities for the future. And we're certainly going to learn from what may be out there in terms of other conferences' activities and the new announcement of a Big 10 channel and the Mountain West involvement in a channel of its own.

And so that's an option we're going to be interested in looking at. But I think it's important to keep in mind that it has to happen in the context of the agreements that we have in place and the negotiation rights that are associated with those agreements.

We're certainly going to enter our discussions with ABC/ESPN with every intent of renewing that agreement in some form. And we'll have to see how that goes.

In terms of what we're looking for, I think that it will be important that we continue to enhance exposure. There's no question about that. And in that way, I'm not just thinking about a football or a men's basketball, but really the broad array of sports that we have championships for in the conference. We're obviously going to be interested in doing the best job we can to enhance revenue for our members. There's no doubt about that.

And if in the sort of growing area of multi-media rights, there are ways that we can be of assistance to our universities generally in providing exposure opportunities for other parts of the university; I think we're going to be interested in those ideas as well. So I think there will be a number of factors at play here, and I don't know that one is of greater importance necessarily than another.

But clearly we operate in an environment in which, you know, we're subject to what happens with the marketplace. We're not oblivious to what goes on in other conferences and the impact that they have on recruiting and things of that kind, so we want to take all of those factors into consideration.

Q. Kevin, a year ago at this time you mentioned an interest in seeing teams kind of beef up nonconference schedules, football, to enhance the TV possibilities early in the season. How do you feel that has shook out in the last year and moving forward?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: I think we're seeing some signs of progress there. That's my general sense of it. I think there's been

a real attempt almost across the board to take a good look at enhancing schedules. You know, in a perfect world, I think it would be great if we could have annually 12 to 15 games in our nonconference against teams from conferences that have annual automatic BCS inclusion. And it would be great if we had another 15 or 20 games against teams from maybe conferences that don't have BCS automatic access that have been in Bowl games or have been quality teams. If we could get to that level of having 25, 30 of those games out of our 48 nonconference opportunities, I think that would be a pretty strong position to be in.

We're not quite there yet, but I've noticed some quality games are being added. And I know this is not easy for athletics directors, because they're looking at balancing a lot of issues and building schedules.

So this is not an area where we talked about conference mandates, but we've talked about trying to encourage people to improve scheduling. I know Tim Allen works in a very cooperative way to provide advice on television opportunities and we have tried to provide some incentives through our television revenue sharing program to improve nonconference scheduling, and I think those efforts are likely to continue.

Q. Kevin, theoretically speaking, what could be done to enhance your exposure in college football? Would you be interested in like a Thursday night game if an opportunity provided itself?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: I don't think we're really that interested in playing on nontraditional days of the week. That's something that we've historically stayed away from, while on an occasional Thursday or particularly early in the season or Friday late in the season, like we do now with Thanksgiving Friday, those are opportunities that we continue to be interested in and to want to look at.

But in terms of adding a regular exposure of that kind, I don't think that's something that we would like to do. We would like to consider the possibility, though, if we can make economic sense of it, having more games on, and we would be open minded to, for example, in the early window having potentially two games under a future scenario that might exist in an early window or perhaps an afternoon window as opposed to the single game that we've been doing on most early window situations.

But those are things we're going to have to walk through as we think about this negotiation and the opportunities that may be available to us. I think it's a double-edged sword sometimes for athletics directors. They like to have the exposure of games being on but they also can be concerned from time to time about their gait. And so we are trying to find that right balance that makes sense.

Q. Kevin, I know you no longer are BCS coordinator, thank goodness. Do you have a sense that the man on the street really understands what's going to happen the first week of January?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: I think we have work to do there. I know we're very much aware of that. I know Mike Slive is. I think we're making some progress, though, the more that you all write about what's occurring there, I think the more that will occur and that our broadcast partners have a chance to explain it as we go forward.

There still seems to be a little misconception about the movement of the championship game to a later date and whether or not, you know, teams playing on or about January 1 are then feeding into that game. And so that's an issue that has to be clarified in terms of the fact that this continues to be the top two teams in the final standings that are playing in the championship game. Not some sort of playing structure. So I think there's some work that needs to be done there. And I think Mike and Charles Bloom and his staff are going to be working on that here in the weeks ahead.

Q. Can you talk about the Big 12 Basketball Tournament as far as negotiations, as far as moving that and how, where y'all are in that?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: Yeah, we have this season in Oklahoma City and we've announced recently the 2008 tournaments being in Kansas City. And then we are open after that. So as I said earlier, we would anticipate in the winter or spring engaging in a process to look at basketball sites, in addition to football sites. So starting with the 2009 year.

For those of you who were in Colorado Springs, you might recall this, our coaches have talked a lot about the playing dates of our tournament. So we've got some issues there to

analyze and to look at as well. I think generally speaking our basketball coaches would like to see the tournament end by Saturday night as opposed to playing on Sunday.

And they also put with that a caveat that it doesn't take too much away from our television exposure for the event. So we've got to see what that balance may look like and I'm not sure exactly where that issue may go.

There was also some interest expressed by our members to take a look at whether the practice of putting the men's and women's tournaments together in the same city was the right practice for the future. So we'll continue to look at that as we prepare to go through a bid process for 2009, I guess it would be, and beyond.

Q. You know, talked about the man on the street and football. Kevin, are you concerned that that football fan might think there are too many college football games now with the four new ones?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: We've been very fortunate in the sense as the college football post-season has expanded in terms of the number of games, the viewership associated with those games has continued to be very strong. The interest in the games, I think in that regard, is good, and we have to give credit to our partners that telecast those games, I think, for doing a good job of building sort of Bowl week ideas and things about -- like that around it to help with the overall promotion structure. I think that each of the individual Bowls also works hard to make sure that in their marketplace the games are well promoted.

So I have not seen at this point a situation where I feel like that we've had an erosion of support for the overall Bowl structure.

I think there are natural limits probably to how many games there can be based on the reasonable number of eligible teams and things of that kind. But from my perspective, as long as we're going to continue to have a post-season structure like we have built around Bowl games, that we should make sure that we're providing the most opportunities we possibly can for teams and athletes.

And that's been one of our major areas of focus.

Q. Kevin, you've talked in the past about perhaps anchoring the football

championship game and the basketball tournament maybe in three, four-year blocks, any news or update on that front?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: It comes up virtually every time we go through one of these processes to think about future sites, and I fully expect it's going to come up again. And so my sense is that's going to be another issue that we'll have to walk through as we prepare to go into a bid cycle. And I think that will be some of the discussion and activity this fall leading into that winter/spring time frame that I talked about.

Q. People leaning one way or the other?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: At this point I've not seen a majority that has expressed a desire to move in a different direction from what we've been doing, which is a rotation of events. But there's been people in our governance groups that raised that issue. I'm quite confident it will be raised again.

Q. Kevin, two-part question. The idea of a ninth conference game totally dead? Your opinion? And two, do you or any of the other BCS commissioners favor reinserting the (inaudible) schedule to help nonconference schedules?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: The ninth conference game, I think we have aired that one out fully. And we debated it and discussed it for several months. In fact, it seemed like it was an issue we couldn't quite figure out how to stop the discussion on it for a period of time. And finally at our spring meetings we got to a point where I think it was clear that the consensus did not favor a ninth game.

And so it was my feeling at that time that we had adequately addressed that issue and could go forward with our planning both for future championship game sites but also for television negotiation, understanding we were looking at an eight-game conference schedule with the two divisional structure and a championship game.

I think reasonably there's nothing that would preclude our members from raising it again at a future point. Under our conference rules, I think there would need to be at least a couple of years before that item could be brought back up as a formal proposal to make change.

I suppose it's possible that if we got a

majority of members that felt like the nonconference scheduling piece was just getting unimaginable from some perspective, then, you know, we could revisit the matter.

But I really felt like we gave it a pretty full review and hearing and I think for at least the time being we're moving forward with the format we've had in place.

I think it's an issue that will continue to come up and receive discussion. I've thought a lot about it. If I felt like that we could structure a strength of schedule component that would not lead us to, back to a place that I would want to be, which is more confusion about the components of the BCS formula, then I think it would be potentially helpful, because there's no question that it could be a real incentive in terms of scheduling. I think that's a true statement to have that. That's why we got there in the first place, when it was originally put into the formula, because we felt like it would send a message that who you play is an important aspect in determining your opportunities in the BCS structure.

But I do believe that it would be not easy to reinsert a formula piece without again having a lot of you writing the structure is too driven by computers or something along those lines.

Q. Kevin, now that there's a championship game, do you foresee the next time your point person with BCS comes around that there may be a championship format that leads to that championship game if the presidents are inclined to go that direction? I know it's a crystal ball. What's your feeling on that?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: I haven't thought about being the BCS coordinator again. It's not a great thought. (Laughter). I'm interested in continuing to work to improve the structure. I gave that testimony to Congress back in December. I think in order to do it, you know, you really have to have some things change. And one of the most important ones would be the presidents or chancellors would express a willingness to allow us to explore models that could include extra games in the post season. Until we get that kind of green light, it really doesn't make much sense to be spending time looking at those kinds of models.

So I think clearly from a television standpoint, a revenue standpoint, some sort of playing opportunity or a so-called plus-one might

be an improvement. But I don't know that it would eliminate controversy. You still have questions about, you know, who are the fourth and the fifth teams at that point as opposed to maybe who is two and three. So I'm interested in taking a look at those things. Whether or not we can get there without doing damage in some way to the rest of the Bowl system, I don't know. But I would imagine that even though we had a very good year in the BCS structure last year, we're all familiar with the history of the system. And I fully expect there are going to be ongoing questions and issues being raised as we go forward in this next two or three years.

So I'm guessing that the options are going to have to be looked at as we work our way over the course of this next three-or-so-year period.

Q. The eliminating of the fans rushing the field at the game, is that strictly a Big 12 endeavor or something nationwide?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: No, it's been a nationwide focus. Each conference, though, I think has an obligation to think about what it can do from a conference perspective. Some conferences have taken different approaches. The Southeastern Conference, for example, has gone to a system of fining the institutions when the fans rush the field, or court in basketball. NCAA has conducted national forums and seminars on the matter. Including some recently. And there was actually a death of a student in Division III football game who was involved in a post-situation game in which a goal post fell on the student.

So it's a problem that really cuts across all divisions and all of college football in many ways.

Q. The status now of a Pac-10/Big 12 basketball challenge -- and is there conversations with Big 12 with any other power leagues in basketball about a similar challenge situation?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: Just as a reminder, we did have extensive discussions with the Southeastern Conference about the possibility of partnering with them on a basketball challenge. They were interested in a fairly limited structure of games. Our people -- and they also were thinking about it more neutral sites. Our people wanted all conference members to have a chance to participate and they wanted the games

to occur on campus. So we really couldn't find a way to reach agreement there. And the SEC moved on and reached agreement with the Big East to do something like that. We've been interested in this concept for a while, not because other conferences do it, but because we've been searching for ways to continue to improve nonconference schedules across our conference, which is an important factor in strength of conference and RPI. And the Pac-10 has expressed a lot of interest in the possibility of partnering with us on that.

The dilemmas that we face in building something like that with them is obviously they have 10 members and we have 12. And we have different television entities that are involved in the telecasting of our regular season basketball. Nonetheless, I think we're making some progress on a possible format that might work. And we'll be talking more to our administrators about that here in the coming weeks.

And I think that our coaches, for really the first time in Colorado Springs expressed pretty much unanimous support for us to try to move forward with something like that. So we seem to have good support at this point from our coaches. Now, when we get down to the final approval process of bringing something like that forward and everybody looks at the details, we'll have to see if that support is still there.

Q. You can't really project a timetable when that might happen?

COMMISSIONER KEVIN WEIBERG: In a perfect world we'd like to have this in place if we can, not this coming basketball season, but the 2007-'8 basketball season. So I think that's kind of our target for potentially making something like that work. If we can't make a formal challenge idea work or something like that, then the general issue of enhancing scheduling through alliances with conferences is something we're going to continue to pursue.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you very much, Commissioner. We appreciate your comments and answering questions.

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