

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Commissioner Press Conference

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our 2022 Pac-12 Football Media Day. I want to start by thanking our student-athletes for being here today and for representing their teammates. I also want to thank and welcome our football head coaches, athletic directors, many of our distinguished football alumni, our corporate partners, the Rose Bowl and our other bowl partners. A special welcome to the National Football Foundation, celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

I also want to thank the dozens of Pac-12 staff members who work behind the scenes for months to make this day a success.

Finally, I want to thank the members of the media who have joined us in person. We greatly appreciate all that you do to tell the stories of the Pac-12 to our fans.

Just over one year ago I joined the Pac-12 as commissioner because I believe strongly in the Pac-12's mission to develop the next generation of leaders by championing excellence in academics, athletics and the well-being of our student-athletes.

While college sports are undergoing unprecedented transformation, that mission has not changed and will never change for the Pac-12.

Since the Pac-12 was formed, we've been a leader in supporting student-athletes. I'll give you a few examples. We were the first conference to include student-athletes in our formal governing structure. We provide leadership around student-athlete care, both in mental health support and guaranteeing post-competition injury care for four years, twice as long as our peer conferences.

We guarantee financial support for degree completion. We



have always led in the areas of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice initiatives. We fought for student-athlete time demand legislation to ensure the primacy of academics.

However, when I look at what is taking place in college sports, I believe that we have collectively lost sight of the student-athlete. We need to recalibrate our approach to ensure our filter for any decision is what is in their best interest.

The good news is I believe that there is a path forward that will allow us to stay true to our mission and support our student-athletes while also adjusting to the reality of today's changing landscape.

So my message today is one of optimism both for the future of the Pac-12 and for our industry.

Let's turn to the state of Pac-12 football, which is why we are here today. Our football goals remain the same: to optimize for CFP invitations and ultimately to win football championships. While we are coming off a year where we had multiple elite teams in the conversation for the College Football Playoff until very late in the season, we ultimately fell short of our goal of qualifying a team for the Playoffs.

However, after the season, the 2021 NFL Draft saw two top-10 picks from the Pac-12. In our off-season we saw a groundswell of investment in football across our campuses.

These investments came in coaching, recruiting, stadiums and other facilities. These investments have already paid off in recruiting. All four of the 5-star recruits from the Pac-12's geographic footprint committed to Pac-12 schools this past year. Our schools brought in even more talent through the transfer portal. Our schools attracted 40 players from other Power Five conferences with at least one Power Five player going to each Pac-12 school.

These transfers included the highest rated player in the transfer portal and the reigning Biletnikoff Award winner. We are also welcoming four new head coaches to the Pac-12 this year. Dan Lanning comes from Georgia where he led the nation's top defense to a national championship. In fact, Coach Lanning's Georgia defense was record



setting, giving up just 8.8 points per game.

USC Lincoln Riley took Oklahoma to the College Football Playoffs three times in five seasons with the Sooners.

Kalen DeBoer heads to Washington after leading Fresno State to a 10-win season in just his second year.

Jake Dickert took over at Washington State at the end of last season leading the Cougars to wins in three of their last four conference games, including the Apple Cup.

Pac-12 schools will also be part of some of the most anticipated football games in college football this season. In week one we have a highly anticipated SEC doubleheader. Coach Lanning will take Oregon to Atlanta to take on his former squad and the defending national championships, Georgia. Later that day, defending Pac-12 champions Utah open their season in the Swamp against the Florida Gators.

Off the field we led the effort to enact an NCAA rule change that allows conferences to determine their own qualification mechanisms for their championship football games.

Following that rule change, we immediately announced our strategic decision that going forward our two best teams as measured by conference record will compete in our football championship game.

Last year that game featured Utah and Oregon, attracted a near-sellout crowd at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, and a TV viewership that averaged over 4 million and peaked at over 5 million viewers. We are back in Vegas this year and tickets go on sale today for our 2022 championship game on Friday, December 2nd.

Beyond football I'd like to acknowledge the success of our student-athletes across all sports. Last year the Pac-12 won seven NCAA championships, tied for the most in the nation, and marking the 17th straight year that the Pac-12, the Conference of Champions, has led or tied for the most NCAA championships.

This year the 50th anniversary of Title IX also saw the Pac-12 win its 200th women's championship, an incredible milestone and far more than any other conference, a testament to our schools' commitment to women's sports.

As a conference, we are of course very disappointed by the decisions by USC and UCLA to leave the Pac-12 and a century of tradition and rivalries after 2024. That said, USC and UCLA have been proud members of the Pac-12 for almost a century. Despite their decision, we cherish our

relationship with their student-athletes, coaches, staff, faculty, alumni and fans.

For that reason I personally have instructed everyone at our conference to make sure that USC and UCLA student-athletes are given every opportunity to compete and succeed for as long as they remain in the Pac-12.

Moving ahead we are bullish about the Pac-12's future and our opportunities for long-term growth, stability and success. Our conference boasts 10 of the most iconic and innovative brands in all of sports, all-around excellence in academics and athletics, and a half dozen of the most valuable markets in this country.

Over the past four weeks, we have been directed by our board to focus the work related to the future of the conference into three work streams. First, we will continue the work we had already started last year to enhance the value of our media rights. This work includes the creation of new made-for-television events, elevating our non-conference competition, and adding new revenue streams.

Examples of this work include our decision to start the Pac-12 baseball and softball championships, changing the NCAA rule to elevate the media value of our football championship game, and being the first Power Five conference to sell rights to our data.

All this work will benefit our student-athletes' ability to continue to compete at the highest level of college athletics.

Second, we have initiated our media rights negotiations. We are in the enviable position of being next to market after the Big Ten. We already have significant interest from potential partners including both incumbents and new traditional television and most importantly digital media partners. This interest is driven by the strength of our schools' brands and markets and a recognition of our continued leadership position in college football across the Western and Mountain time zones. With the value of premium college sports rights continuing to rise, multiple interested media partners and limited opportunities, particularly in the west, we are confident in the long-term value of our rights.

To set expectations, this process will accelerate after the Big Ten deals are concluded and will likely take months to complete. Even with the loss of our two L.A. schools, we still believe that after the current cycle of media rights deals, we will be very well positioned among the Power Five from a revenue-per-school standpoint.



This is critical to ensure our athletic departments have the resources necessary to continue to compete for national championships, attract the best coaches, and support the health and well-being of our student-athletes.

Third, we are actively exploring expansion opportunities. As we consider these opportunities, we will look at media value, athletic strength, academic and cultural fit, and geography from a recruiting and student-athlete experience standpoint.

As you would expect, we've had significant inbound interest and are in the process of evaluating opportunities.

Let me turn to two important issues facing college athletics and suggest some potential solutions.

First with respect to name, image and likeness, I believe it is time for the 10 FBS conferences to step in and agree to NIL legislation and a strong, effective and expeditious enforcement mechanism. All 10 conferences are strongly in favor of student-athletes being able to benefit from their NIL.

But we also need three simple and obvious guardrails: NIL should not be used as an inducement. NIL should not be used as pay-for-play. And the amount earned as NIL payments should be commiserate what the NIL provided and not a veiled inducement or pay-for-play.

These are current NCAA rules that the NCAA has unfortunately chosen not to enforce in the wake of the Supreme Court decision in Alston. Recodifying and enforcing these three simple NIL rules will protect our student-athletes while still allowing them to earn.

Second, it's time for us to consider steps we can take to fairly recognize our student-athletes' contributions and more appropriately allocate the resources created through athletics without fundamentally changing the role of our educational institutions.

While I do not believe that our student-athletes should be treated as employees, we must recognize and meaningfully address the extraordinary ways in which they contribute to our athletic programs, campuses and communities.

One solution might be to consider whether to expand or remove the remaining caps on academic awards. Whatever solutions are considered, there are many reasons why treating student-athletes as employees would be detrimental.

There could be a draft system, and athletes would lose the

choice of which school to attend. They could lose their ability to transfer between schools. In fact, professional athletes are typically subject to trades or being fired for poor performance. It's hard to imagine that professional athletes would be required or even allowed to attend school to earn degrees.

I am also concerned about what happens to our broad-based athletic offerings when a school's athletic department becomes so dramatically altered that its primary interests are tied to professional sports and not education.

We are committed to finding an appropriate solution, and I believe the time to start engaging in these conversations with our student-athletes has arrived.

Taking a step back, looking more broadly at the state of college athletics, it is clear that financial considerations have become the primary driver for many recent decisions in college sports. There is already a lot of money in college athletics. With the new media deals, the expansion of the College Football Playoff, there will soon be significantly more to go around.

Increased revenue can help us support our student-athletes, but a singular focus on money will certainly cause more harm than good.

College athletics has a unique structure where conferences and schools compete against each other for resources to support their individual student-athletes, but the long-term viability of the enterprise relies on schools and many conferences being healthy and able to compete.

Our long-term measure for the success of college athletics cannot be how much money we consolidate into ten or five or two conferences, but rather should be our ability to support the largest number of student-athletes while still facilitating competition between schools and conferences.

We should be measuring how many lives we can change by providing scholarships to students that otherwise would not attend college. We should be measuring total financial aid and our ability to provide the highest level of athletic competition to our student-athletes without unnecessary travel, time demands and other burdens on competition impeding their academic success.

We should be measuring our ability to provide competition in a manner that does not harm our student-athletes' physical and mental health.

We are at a critical juncture and the decisions we make in the near future will determine whether we head towards a

world in which a small handful of conferences are playing professional sports at the expense of tens of thousands of academic opportunities, or we use the bounty of resources available to continue to develop future leaders through sport and to expand financial aid opportunities to more and more student-athletes.

Despite all the challenges facing college athletics, I remain confident in our collective mission to develop the next generation of leaders, and I remain confident in the Pac-12.

I would like to invite my colleagues Merton Hanks and Bernard Muir on the stage to join me to take your questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. George, when you meet in the CFP management meetings in the months ahead, how do you intend to convey to Kevin Warren and Greg Sankey specifically that it's in the best interest of the Big Ten and the SEC to continue to allow the Pac-12 access to the CFP at all and any revenue split at all post 2026?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: No one has ever argued that the remaining 10 members of the Pac-12 don't deserve to be in the CFP. I'm not going to distinguish that question.

Q. Bernard and George, barring federal legislation, how do you and the other conferences regulate NIL without inviting anti-trust lawsuits?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Well, anti-trust is the reason why the current NCAA rules are not being enforced. The risk of anti-trust diminishes when you have a smaller number of conferences, smaller number of schools instituting rules and enforcing those rules. That's why I'm calling for the 10 CFP conferences -- the 10 BCS conferences to focus our attention as opposed to waiting for the NCAA.

BERNARD MUIR: I would agree with that. I think it's important that we have some level of enforcement. Certainly we're seeing that in the recruiting realm where schools and I should say boosters and friends of the institution are getting involved when they shouldn't be. That's not the essence of this.

We are in favor of student-athletes earning revenue from their name, image and likeness.

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I meant FBS, sorry.

The clear line for me should be that boosters should not be able to interact with high school students before they've

committed. Coaches should be able to say to a recruit that historically kids who have come here and played that position at that level have enjoyed this kind of NIL. But you can't negotiate the NIL before the kid has committed. That would be a good bright-line rule that I think would be easier to implement.

Q. What gives you confidence that the 10 remaining schools are going to stay in this conference?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: We've had two board meetings a week for the last four weeks. Looking my colleagues in the eye, understanding their commitment, that their first priority is making sure that the Pac-12 survives, thrives and grows and is successful.

They're committed to the conference. I think the best thing to do is to ask them about it.

With respect to the Big 12 being open for business, I appreciate that. We haven't decided if we're going shopping there or not yet.

Q. How much consideration has been put in merging with the Mountain West or even adding reasonable teams that have been successful against the Pac-12?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: We have not dug into merging with the Mountain West. That's not one of the options we've looked at.

Q. Why did it take so long for the Pac-12 in particular to recognize, start recognizing, NIL?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I believe we were the first conference to recognize NIL. We proposed legislation before anyone else.

Q. Before the legislation, why did it take so long, regardless of the conference, for college athletics to recognize the NIL for student-athletes?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I wasn't here. I can't speak for college athletics before a year ago.

BERNARD MUIR: I've been here in this league for a decade now as of this week.

I think prior to that, college sport was just really concerned about what we're seeing here, boosters, others getting involved too early, it becoming an inducement to get to a particular school.

This has been grounded in education for many years. It still should be. There's a place for that.

Unfortunately maybe 20 years ago we should have seen this coming and made these adjustments. We just didn't get to it until of late.

Q. Could you speak to the lack of collegiality in general among your peers? Within your room, with any room in college athletics, why should anyone trust anyone given the last few years?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Yeah, up until very, very recently I thought the discussions were very collegial. I think in the last month that has changed, unfortunately.

I hope that we regain that collegiality because I actually think that's the way that you solve problems. I know I'm going to put myself out there to be as embracive and inclusive of my colleagues as I can be to try and move us forward.

I think it's unfortunate if we go the other direction.

Q. Have you discussed at all the two state schools and the issue with the travel ban, particularly UCLA and Cal, regarding other states? Is the conference going to help out, or is this something where the schools are going to have to fund money for ought-of-state trips?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: It's part of the discussion. It's part of a much broader discussion, particularly about UCLA's decision. I think, as everybody knows, there's a hearing of the regents on October 17th where UCLA will have to defend their decision to leave the Pac-12.

Everything is wrapped up in that. The travel ban will certainly be part of what's discussed.

Q. In regards to USC and UCLA leaving, how concerned are the other teams in regards to the recruiting pie that is California?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I can tell you my observation from the conference level, and maybe Bernard can chime in. Merton at some point will get a question about football (smiling).

My impression with respect to recruiting is that for UCLA and USC it's probably going to be neutral with respect to football. They'll probably lose some people who don't want to play across the country. They'll probably pick up some people that want to play in the Big Ten.

From feedback I've gotten from decisions that recruits have already made and recruits have said to coaches of the 10

remaining schools, actually we think the 10 remaining schools are going to significantly benefit in recruiting from UCLA and USC's decision in every sport other than football.

BERNARD MUIR: I would agree with that. We recruit nationally. There's great interest in our institution, especially the educational value that we bring. I think when I look at my other peers within the Pac-12, I think they're very excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

That's -- obviously we take a slight hit in football, but across the board in our Olympic sports, we're proud of our prowess. There's a reason we have that moniker, Conference of Champions, and I think that will continue.

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Think about the fact that for the last 17 years, we across the board unfortunately have been in last place with respect to revenue across the Power Five and have won more champions than anyone else. That's because we recruit the right kids and the right kids want to play in the Pac-12.

Q. Merton, what is the tiebreaker criteria this season in a divisionless format? Based upon your existing criteria, we could very quickly get to some sort of computer algorithm or a coin toss in a hurry.

MERTON HANKS: We'll be releasing the updated tiebreaker criteria on our website and will be able -- God and country will be able to see the adjustments.

In a nutshell, everything is about conference play, head-to-head, common opponents. It was very important to our coaches, our administrators, our football working group, that the conference decide who the best two teams are, not other factors.

Those will be reflected on the tiebreakers, and we'll put that on our website.

Q. George, you say that you haven't determined whether you're going to go shopping in the Big 12 or not. You don't hear something like that often from a commissioner saying they might target another conference's schools. Usually it's the other way around. One, has anybody, any members of the Big 12, reached out to you about potentially joining the Pac-12? Secondly, you talk about being collegial. Do you think the days of trying to be collegial when it comes to expansion are over?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I hope they're not over. But they're certainly harmed. That remark was a reflection of the fact I've been spending four weeks trying to defend

against grenades that have been lobbed in from every corner of the Big 12 trying to destabilize our remaining conference.

I understand why they're doing it, when you look the relative media value between the two conferences. I get it, I get why they're scared, why they're trying to destabilize it. I was just tired of that. That's probably not the most collegial thing I've ever said.

Q. Has anybody reached out to you?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I'm not going to talk about who we've talked to.

Q. George, when you look at the media rights deal, how it will be structured, how likely will it be that it's a non-traditional partner, Amazon, Apple?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Without talking about individual potential partners, I would say it's highly likely that we will end up with a big digital partner for some of our rights and that our rights will be distributed in a way that's unique, different and new. We're excited about that.

Q. When you're considering schools to replace UCLA or USC, what are some of the criteria you're looking for?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I went through those in my speech. I specifically enumerated those.

Start with market, the media value. Go to the athletic value, whether or not they would contribute to the Conference of Champions. Academic and culture fit is part of it. Then we're very focused, I think uniquely, in thinking about the effect of student-athletes when we add schools. We think about travel and about what we're going to put our student-athletes through if we expand geographically too far away.

I'm proud of the fact that's part of our criteria.

Q. Commissioner, as you look forward a couple years down the road, which might seem like miles and miles at this point where things change by the second, how important will it be to maintain some sort of Southern California footprint, philosophically, in a business sense? How does that factor into considering potential schools like San Diego State who might be in a unique position related to that?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Again, I'm not going to talk about specific schools.

Southern California is really important to us. I think there are different ways of approaching staying part of Southern California. We may end up playing a lot of football games in L.A.

Q. It's been alleged that USC misled you. Is that a fair description?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I'm not going to talk about that. We're going to take the high road and not talk about what happened in the past.

We're very, very focused on the future. We're focused and confident in the 10 schools that remain in the Pac-12 being together, growing and succeeding as a group.

Q. George, I know you've talked the past four weeks about lobs coming from the Big 12. How do you prevent further lobs or raids from the Big Ten, especially when three or four of your members have been mentioned, including Bernard and Stanford?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: I'm focused on what we can control. What we can control is to do everything we can to make the Pac-12 healthy and strong and to do it together, the 10 of us. That's what I'm focused on. I'm not focused on what other conferences are doing.

Q. In previous discussions about conference expansion, there's always been talk about the conference's need to preserve or find cultural and academic matches. In this current environment where it seems like we're looking for financial matches, how important is that still today?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: That's really important to the Pac-12. Cultural, academic fit is important. It's one of our criteria.

Listen, we understand how important revenue is. We understand that for the last 10 years, because of a series of decisions that were made by the conference 10 years ago, we're behind. We have to close the gap in revenue. That's going to be a focus.

But as we think about adding schools, one of the criteria will be cultural, academic fit. It's really important to our presidents and chancellors who make these decisions at the end of the day.

BERNARD MUIR: I would agree. What I've seen recently, as George has mentioned, we've been on numerous calls with our presidents and chancellors, this is important to them, and likewise it's important to athletic directors to execute on that plan.

I assume there will be many more discussions to come, but that would be a high priority as we evaluate the future.

Q. Bernard, have you had any discussions with the Big Ten or any other conference?

BERNARD MUIR: We have not. I will say in our meeting yesterday with my fellow peers around the conference, we have been really open and transparent. We understand the issues at hand.

When this broke a month ago, we all, each one of us, are trying to figure out scenario planning. We have discussions internally and try to figure that out. But we have had not had any formal overture from another conference.

Q. George, the unlikely event in the next couple years that USC or UCLA made the CFP, besides the money that the conference gets, what would be the benefit to the Pac-12 of that?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: They're Pac-12 schools for the next two years. We're rooting for their student-athletes.

Q. Why? There's been other conferences that took out --

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Because it's the right thing to do.

MERTON HANKS: I would say it's no different than our friends at the AAC when Cincinnati made the CFP. They made it as AAC members. They got the benefit. Quite frankly, they deserved it. It's no different.

Our L.A. schools are Pac-12 members. We're going to treat them accordingly and proudly and that they're successful. Certainly everything we've done from the center would suggest we're doing everything we can from a legislative standpoint by putting our two best teams in our football championship game, giving everyone equal opportunity from a platform standpoint for CFP participation.

We're going to be mighty proud, quite frankly, if we have one of our L.A. schools in the next two years in the CFP because they will be Pac-12 representatives.

Q. Is there any chance for the L.A. schools to come back? Any chance for negotiation to where the defection doesn't happen?

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Here's how I would characterize that.

I'd say UCLA is in a really difficult position. There are a lot of constituents related to UCLA who are very, very, very unhappy with the decision. Student-athletes, the families of student-athletes. The faculty, the staff. The politicians, the fans, the alumni. There's a lot of really, really upset people with that decision.

There's a hearing coming up about that decision.

I can't give you a percentage chance. I think it's unlikely. But if they came back, we'd welcome them back.

Q. If everybody's going one way, why not go the other way? Is there room from a conference standpoint to make money differently from the others? Can football compete in a new environment where they say, Okay, everybody is going to act like they're little pro leagues, but we're going to be something different? Would there be any benefit at the school level?

BERNARD MUIR: Well, football's important. That's why you are all here. That's what the focus is on. It's going to continue to be. The revenue is important, so it funds not only football, that endeavor, but also our other sports. In my case there's 35 other sports that I wake up worrying about, trying to figure out how do we feed them, nourish them, continue to grow.

Looking at it differently, to your question, I think we are now in a position where we have to, as 10 members, how are we going to continue to compete, put our student-athletes in a position to compete for championships. That's why they come to our institutions.

I think we're going to have to have some out-of-the-box thinking. That's part of this. As our commissioner stated, we are in truly the business of trying to provide the best experience possible for our young people. That's what we're going to set out to do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

GEORGE KLIAVKOFF: Thanks, everybody. Appreciate you all being here.

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