

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Commissioner

Brett Yormark

Commissioner Media Day Press Conference



BRETT YORMARK: I'm going to give you a mini-review of where we've been since July obviously focused at least initially on basketball, then I'll give you some of my thoughts on what's happening in the industry if that's okay.

Welcome to Big 12 basketball in the first season as a 16-team league. On the women's front, we've added four incredible programs to a league that has had six teams or more in the tournament for three straight years. Four of our women's programs are in the top 16 of the preseason AP poll for the first time since 2008.

I'm incredibly bullish on our programs and women's basketball as a whole. We have some of the biggest names and best coaches in women's basketball. Fan interest is rising. Last season Big 12 women's basketball viewership was up 111 percent year over year.

We are taking all the right steps to maintain our status as a premier league for women's basketball. We have transitioned Dayna Scherf into the role of VP of women's basketball, where she will continue the growth of our women's basketball in the Big 12.

This season we'll see 19 linear broadcasts of Big 12 women's basketball, the most since the 2018-19 season. We are moving to an 18-game schedule, which I'm sure you're aware of, for conference play this season, and we'll see how that goes.

For the second time our women's championship will take place right here at T-Mobile, ensure a best-in-class championship experience for not only our student-athletes but for our fans alike.

Additionally, our women's championship game will now be played on Sunday on ESPN, providing greater broadcast and fan exposure for the pinnacle of our season.

If BYU earns a spot in the championship, the game will be

pushed to Monday.

Our men's basketball continues to be second to none. Four straight years we've led the conferences in average NET rankings. With the addition of the four corners, our league has become even stronger. Last week the Big 12 became the first conference in history to have five teams in the top 10 of the AP preseason poll.

Fan interest has never been higher. Our ratings are up, especially in that coveted younger viewership demographic.

This is the third consecutive year we've seen viewership growth among younger (audio interruption).

This season the spotlight will shine even brighter. 93 men's games will be carried on linear television this season, the most since the 2018-19 season. This season we'll also see the debut of an expanded partnership with CBS; at least 26 games per season will air across CBS Sports' platforms.

This season will be our first ever 20-game schedule as we become a 16-team league for the first time. Last year over 100,000 fans showed up for our championship, and we continue to work alongside the KC Sports Commission and T-Mobile to ensure the Big 12 championship experience will be an incredible one and a wonderful moment for our fans and student-athletes.

Before (audio interruption) studios, the league's first ever fast channel. Both of these platforms are introduced to further the Big 12's storytelling efforts and to ensure fans have Big 12 accessible coverage across the country.

We also continue to prioritize our content strategy. The Big 12 has seen over 100,000 new followers across our social media channels since July. On the field and on the court, we've also seen great success. Big 12 volleyball has six teams in the top 25. Next week our soccer championship will kick off right here in Kansas City at the brand new CPKC stadium, and we're thrilled about the opportunity to be there.

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During football media days in Vegas, we promised a season of parity, depth, and an exciting race to the Big 12 championship. So far, I'd say we've delivered. Probably over-delivered in that respect.

Right now we are on pace to have multiple teams in the first ever 12-team college football playoff. Through eight weeks, seven Big 12 teams are either bowl eligible or one win away from eligibility. November will see the launch of a brand campaign around the final month of league play, highlighting the must-see matchups as teams contend for the conference championship game.

With basketball tipping off and football on the home stretch, the Big 12 will be must-see TV in November. This year's Big 12 football championship will be the culmination of an incredible season. Later this week we'll announce this year's halftime performer. This Grammy-winning artist will be joined by the school bands for what will be an incredible show.

Our industry is going through a period of change, but with change comes opportunities. I don't want to get into any specifics, but the Big 12 continues to explore impactful commercial opportunities. We also continue to look into the potential value of adding a strategic partner, someone who can come in and provide capital resources and business-building strategy.

I speak weekly with my A4 commissioners, and we continue to partner on a variety of initiatives and discussions for the future of college athletics, including settlement.

I just want everyone to know there's great collaboration with our A4 commissioner colleagues, and I'm sure that will continue moving forward.

Regarding the CFP, we cannot discuss changing the format before we even experience the 12-team playoff for the first time this year. Let's be thoughtful about those discussions eventually, but let's see how it unfolds this year.

I've said it before, there has never been a better time than right now to be part of the Big 12 for all the right reasons. We've completely reimagined this conference over the last 25 months, and we've become a truly national brand across 10 states and four time zones.

I want to thank you for your continued support of the Big 12, of our basketball programs, and thank you all for being here today.

Q. Between the boost in national games for men and

women this year, what do you think accounts for that, aside from the profile of the conference? Did you guys make a concerted effort to get more men's and women's games on national television?

BRETT YORMARK: I just think it's indicative of who we are and the brand we have, both on the men's and women's. There's an appetite for great basketball content, and we're the No. 1 basketball conference in America. So it makes sense that we have the biggest and broadest platforms to showcase our student-athletes and our great member institutions.

Q. I imagine over the next two days we'll hear coaches talk about how different the world is for them within NIL and transfer portal and everything, and even just last week a major college basketball coach stepped down, and yet TV ratings for college football are really high, attendance is really high. What does that say about where we are in college sports right now?

BRETT YORMARK: Candidly, I don't think there's been a better time for college athletics than right now. Do we have our challenges? Of course we do, and we're addressing those challenges, and I'm spending a lot of time, as I said earlier, with my A4 commissioner colleagues. But you said it; attendance is up, ratings are up, fan engagement is up, excitement across the country is up, and in some respects, when you think about football, Saturday is becoming bigger than Sunday.

But it's in a period of adjustment right now for our coaches, for our student-athletes, for our fans, and we'll get through it. I'm very optimistic, but I'm very bullish on the future of college athletics.

Q. You've seen a growing trend of teams traveling two and three time zones struggling in football season. Are you guys looking at this basketball season with any adjustments coming to that? Are there any resources you can provide to care for the student-athletes better in those situations?

BRETT YORMARK: When we do our scheduling for any sport, given realignment and now being a 16-team league, we are very thoughtful in that process. We have guiding principles when it comes to travel and student-athlete well-being, and those are at the top of the list. I think our travel this year has been very manageable, but it's not just the conference. We're engaging with our schools, our coaches, different committees that we have formed to make sure we're doing the right thing by our student-athletes.

Q. You hinted at the private equity. Is that going to



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become the norm in college athletics?

BRETT YORMARK: Well, everyone talks about private equity, and I don't really talk about private equity as much as I talk about should we be exploring a strategic partner, someone that provides capital resources and strategy to help us build our business. There's no pride in authorship, and I'm a big believer in outsourcing to people that know more than we do.

Does that mean we end up with a strategic partner? Maybe, maybe not. But it's incumbent upon me as the commissioner to explore every and all options, to make sure we're as strong as we can be as a conference, so I'm doing my appropriate due diligence right now.

I don't have a crystal ball, and who knows what the future holds when it comes to capital and how it makes its way into our ecosystem, but from my perspective I'm doing the appropriate due diligence on behalf of the conference, and we'll see where we land. But thank you for your question.

Q. With revenue sharing coming down the pipe, how realistic do you think it is for all your member schools to be able to hit that full revenue sharing number that's going to be there in year one?

BRETT YORMARK: We talk about rev share quite a bit. I can tell you that our schools all want to continue to compete at the highest levels, and they'll do whatever they need to do in order to do that. I can't sit here today to say that everyone is going to spend up to the cap or not, but we're going to be competitive. We're one of the top conferences in America, and we'll continue to be that moving forward.

Q. You've been pretty outspoken that you feel basketball is undervalued. What are you doing about that? Is that something where you feel like when the media rights is redone in 2030 or whatever that maybe it's separated, or is there anything you're doing in between that can maybe make more of that?

BRETT YORMARK: Listen, I've discussed it before since I've been here. I've been here now about two years. I do think basketball is undervalued. I think there's real upside. I think there's potential growth to further monetize it, both short-term and long-term. I look at our conference championship, and we have grown that from a revenue perspective exponentially over the last two years.

But ultimately the big moment will be our next TV deal, and when we did the current new TV deal that kicks in next year, we gave ourselves optionality on our back-end rights where we can go into the market again in a bundled

fashion, which is historically done, or we could bifurcate basketball from football. We'll determine what we'll do at that time.

But the growth of basketball is -- I think we all see it. It's not just men's, it's women's. You see those WNBA numbers, record Finals ratings. You saw that here last year in our tournament, in the NCAA tournament.

I think there's real upside, and I'm looking to capture as much of that, both short-term and long-term, as I can.

Q. Some power conferences separate their men's and women's basketball tournament sites, and the Big 12 used to do that. Why did you bring it under one roof or why did it come under one roof?

BRETT YORMARK: Well, I inherited it in Kansas City when I got here, and as I've said publicly, having experienced it for the first time in spring of '23, we decided to double down shortly thereafter. We're here through '31. We think it's a great destination, Kansas City. They embrace this tournament for all the right reasons, and obviously having the men's and women's back-to-back here I think gives us a big voice and a big platform, which we enjoy and which is very appropriate.

It's also geographically very desirable. It's in the middle of our footprint, which I also think played a role in us doubling down here in Kansas City. But we love it here, we love the building, we love our fan base, and I'm sure we'll be here for a long time.

Q. Following up on what you said a moment ago, how can the Big 12 and its member schools best capitalize on the momentum that women's basketball has built up?

BRETT YORMARK: Well, I think we're doing it already. Our schools are selling more tickets than they ever have. Our ratings are up. The championship here for the first time at T-Mobile last year was incredible. We go on sale later this week for ticket sales, and I expect those to grow exponentially as we get closer to tournament time in March. So I think there's lots of different ways we can grow it.

We're also obviously -- as you heard earlier, we'll have more linear broadcasts than ever before, most since 2018-19, and original content that the conference is putting out continues to amplify and elevate women's basketball for all the right reasons. We're excited about what it means for our student-athletes but also what it means for this conference.

Q. Just wondering about the 20-game schedule with men. Is it a long-term plan and is there a rotation in mind and could it be different every year with the way you break it up?

BRETT YORMARK: We're going to see how it goes this year. I don't think it's set in stone. We'll evaluate it with our coaches during the season and obviously following the season, and we'll make the determination at that point in time if this is something we want to stick to.

But 20 games obviously this year, and we'll evaluate it as we move forward.

Q. The addition of the four corner schools to this conference, the impact that will have right away as far as ratings go in your mind, how important is that to this expansion process?

BRETT YORMARK: Listen, for me, the four corners, that was a huge get for us, across the board. When I think about the ecosystem, it's helped us in football, it's helped us in women's and men's basketball and obviously Olympic sports. I think as you look at viewership currently and what's going to unfold throughout the first season of the four corners being part of the Big 12, I think you're going to see a lot of ratings increases, men's and women's sports. So we're excited about it. It gives us a national footprint, gets us into a different time zone. It's exactly what we had hoped for, and it's playing out each week right now.

Q. When you mentioned I believe it was travel procedures that you had or scheduling, what are those, and in some of the cases are you, for example, protecting geographic rivals going forward --

BRETT YORMARK: We're protecting rivalries, which I think is critically important. When you think about football as an example, if you cross two time zones one week, you get the bye the following week. Those principles are being carried over to men's and women's basketball and other sports, obviously, within our portfolio.

Student-athlete well-being is critically important. Travel is something we're very mindful of, and it's very much a part of our scheduling process and will continue to be for all the right reasons.

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