

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 14, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Greg Sankey

Commissioner Press Conference



GREG SANKEY: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Atlanta. Two fun facts when you begin. The first fun fact is does the notebook fit with the microphones and the podium? That one's not that interesting.

The second fun fact I learned this morning is that Herb Vincent, our associate commissioner for communications, is also the Beyoncé concert coordinator for our staff. So of any social media moment this week, that may rank towards the top.

Good morning and welcome to the 2025 edition of SEC Football Media Days. It's a privilege certainly for me to be with you once again. We appreciate your work and all the work that's done to make this event possible. It also signals the start of a new season. I look forward to the traditions, the games, the spirit, the intensity, the competition that makes college football and the SEC so special.

Pleased to be back in Atlanta. A little bit of a history lesson. The first meeting of the SEC membership took place in Atlanta February 27, 1933. Apparently, it was the beginning of a tradition of hosting conference meetings around men's basketball tournaments because our men's basketball tournament was first played here also in 1933.

Atlanta, as you know, has served as host to the SEC football championship game since 1994, and just up the road in Duluth, we've had a number of women's basketball tournaments played and SEC gymnastics champions determined.

Also proud we'll be back in Georgia later this year. After a 20-year hiatus, the SEC volleyball tournament returns. We'll be in Savannah, Georgia, November 21st through the 25th at Enmarket Arena, again, in Savannah, and we're looking forward to that event.

Since we're here to talk about football, let me first express appreciation for what's done around the game of college football and the city of Atlanta. First, we're pleased to be back here with a football field in front of us at the College

Football Hall of Fame. It's always fun to see goal posts when you're talking.

The 2025 season will kick off a few blocks from here at Mercedes Benz Stadium when on Thursday, August 30th, Tennessee plays Syracuse, and the next day, Sunday, August 31st, South Carolina plays Virginia Tech. Plenty going on that weekend, but noteworthy we'll be back here to kick off the season with those football games.

Our championship game is a December tradition here in Atlanta. We appreciate Arthur Blank, the Atlanta Falcons organization, and everyone around Mercedes Benz Stadium that provides an incredible experience for our participants and for our fans.

I want to thank the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau. You don't understand how many mechanics there are to pull off something like this: Law enforcement, the city of Atlanta, everyone that makes things work smoothly.

We're also pleased and really proud of our affiliation with Regions Bank. Regions serves as the title sponsor for the SEC Kickoff, and you can see Regions embedded around us. I'll have another note about how they contribute to support our student-athletes through the year in different ways.

Before I move on, I'll just make a note that we're adding to our sponsor program Wayne-Sanderson Farms. We have several members of the Wayne-Sanderson Farms leadership team here with us this morning, and I thank them for their support. Wayne-Sanderson farms has over 20,000 employees and over 2,000 family farms spread across the southeastern footprint.

While I was preparing my remarks for media days, I recall that last time we were here in Atlanta one of my backstage conversations - I've noted this - included the discussion of why powdered wigs went away and neckties remained, and that was with Mike Leach. I just want to make a note that we appreciate an adjustment made by the National Football Foundation to change the qualifying criteria for head coaches that makes Mike and others eligible for election into this college football Hall of Fame.



... when all is said, we're done.®

Also, since we last gathered, we lost Bob Holt, and we've saved a spot, right around where Bob usually sits, to honor Bob. Bob, as you know, worked with the Arkansas Democrat Gazette, he was pretty quick with a question here, and always asked a question with a smile. That did not mean that you might like the question he was asking with a smile, but he had a special way about him, and we miss Bob and respect and honor his memory.

Last month we had a loss in the Southeastern Conference family. Bobby Gaston, who served in a variety of capacities, passed away at the remarkable age of 101. Bobby was still a regular attendee of the SEC football championship game. Atlanta was home for Bobby, as was the SEC during his playing career at Georgia Tech, where he was a teammate of Frank Broyles. He spent 50 years working in the SEC's officiating program. We didn't have social media then, but I'm sure we didn't get them all right in that time frame. The last 18 years of those 50, he served as the programs leader. We remain grateful for Bobby and his work and contributions, and we extend our best wishes to his wife Gail.

We also, at a time when we can't ignore -- in fact, we intentionally remember what happened over the last week and a half or so in the Texas Hill Country in the Central Texas area, yesterday traveling down here listening to news reports that the rains were coming again and emergency warnings were being issued. Watching from afar, it's been an unimaginable loss of life to see. I cannot imagine the grief that families and friends and neighbors and relatives are experiencing not only across our universities in the state of Texas, but across this region, as you start to understand through these stories the depth of relationships that exist.

We offer our thanks to first responders, to emergency workers, and even to those who try to help, whether it's through a search, through debris moving, or simply by giving someone a hug. We also know that closer to this location last fall -- I saw it as I drove last spring from Knoxville to Greenville to be part of our SEC women's basketball tournament -- the devastation left by Hurricane Helene and the impact on real lives. In fact, we were in Asheville, North Carolina, for the Collegiate Commissioners Association meeting, where that organization made a donation to a food bank, and the leader of that food bank spoke in that Asheville area of the remaining and lingering challenges faced for food security in that region.

Be it individuals we know personally or tragedies we know from afar, we share in the grief and in those losses.

We also, though, look ahead to anticipation. There is joy embedded in what we do, and we take pride in what was accomplished last year. Our first as a 16-member, what I think is a "superconference," for all those of you who like to speculate about superconferences, welcome to one. We have common sense geography, restored rivalries, record-breaking viewership. In fact, I asked for some data this weekend. If you take the consumed viewership hours on linear TV, almost 40 percent of that viewership was focused on games involving Southeastern Conference universities and teams.

Big Ten was next, right around 30 percent. That means with those two conferences, just over two-thirds of the total viewership of college football is embedded between the SEC and the Big Ten.

The successes we've enjoyed produced nine National Championships out of our 22 sports, five winners of the Honda Sports Award. We had the nation's highest attendance figures in seven sports. For the 26th consecutive season, we led the nation in football attendance; soccer for the second consecutive season, showing the emergence of that sport in that conference; women's basketball for the sixth consecutive season; men's baseball led the nation in top average. We included the top three attended programs in the nation in Kentucky, Arkansas, and Tennessee. We continued to lead women's gymnastics attendance. Baseball outpaced football; the 28th consecutive year we led the nation in college baseball attendance.

One of the more remarkable stats provided to me was we had a combined total home attendance over 840,000 in softball. When you combine the total attendance of the three other autonomy conferences, the SEC total exceeded those other three conferences' combined total by over 100,000 fans.

It's a special place, remarkable set of people, remarkable competition, and remarkable achievements. We were also proud last year that we were the first to operate fully under the Disney umbrella for broadcast of our competitions. That includes ABC, ESPN platforms, ESPN+, and the SEC Network. So proud of that partnership because in our first year we, together, earned through the SEC on ABC the 2025 sports Emmy for outstanding live series, the first time in 45 years that award had been presented to a college sports property.

You heard from Kevin, one of our new endeavors is Box to Box, a Netflix documentary series spotlighting the 2024 football season. You'll have an opportunity, as was mentioned later this evening, to see one of those episodes. That series goes behind the scenes to really capture what



we think is unprecedented footage and personal stories of our coaches, our student-athletes, and our teams throughout last season.

This afternoon you'll also hear directly from Paul Martin, the series producer, who will provide you with a bit more insight into that project.

Last on my set of notes, this evening on the SEC Network at 7:00 p.m., we'll have the second edition of what we call SEC Startup. That's a pitch competition for business ideas, innovative business ideas presented by student-athletes. Five finalists will populate this year's program, which again is presented by Regions Bank and is on the SEC Network at 7:00 p.m. this evening.

Now, of any room that I occupy, I don't have to educate you that there is a lot going on in and around college sports. In fact, I usually begin writing out at least an outline of my remarks in early June, and had I attempted in early June to write out this full set of remarks, it literally would have changed on a daily basis because it seems as if one wakes up and there's a new story, a new opinion, a new piece of commentary, or a new direction that's been suggested.

But let's take an inventory of all that's happening around college sports and college football right now. We have Congressional activity. We wonder what might be the next state law to be introduced or the next lawsuit. We're interested in litigation that has resulted in individuals being eligible to participate in college sports well into their mid-20s. That starts to remove opportunities for aspiring high school athletes.

There are opinions around collective bargaining, opinions around the size of the NCAA basketball tournament. There are outcomes from what is called the NCAA Division I decision-making working group. There are proposed changes to the NCAA policy that for years has prohibited college athletes and college coaches from gambling on professional sports. There are considerations and commentary related to the future of the NCAA.

I've already mentioned the College Football Playoff as it relates to our work, should it be for 12 or 14 or 16, or if you wait long enough, somebody will introduce another number for consideration. The issues around the College Football Playoff selection committee protocol and process were noted by me at press conferences in Destin.

What's the future of the SEC football schedule? Is it going to be eight or nine games? What do we do about our future bowl relationships? How do we implement terms of the House settlement, and what's the impact of that

settlement upon non-revenue sports, on participation opportunities across all Division I and the sponsorship decisions around sports offered on each campus.

I think the most frequent question I'm asked one-on-one, including in airports as late as yesterday, is what are you going to do about the transfer portal.

There's continuing evaluation by many about the role of outside financing in college sports, often referred to quickly as "private equity." There's a bit of "sudden expertism," as I call it, around us, where somebody is certain to have the next great idea, and as I've shared a few times, there's no easy button for dealing with the complexities that we face.

We also have to work effectively together as conference leaders. Now, I'm not going to walk through and provide you a paragraph or two on each of those items. I know you're grateful for that reality. But let me start with the working relationship among conference commissioners because there's commentary on that from the outside that doesn't see the inside. I think in Division I we all have a responsibility to work with commissioners from all 32 all-sports conferences. There's going to be disagreement. There's vast differences in competitive and economic realities and attendance realities around those programs, but we do spend a great bit of time in dialogue.

We have a second segment of commissioners, those in the bowl subdivision that populate the College Football Playoff management committee.

You'll hear me in a moment talk about our June meetings that I thought were healthy discussions. Whether we make a decision that's predicted to be made or not is really inconsequential from a relational standpoint. What's important is working through the hard issues together.

Then you have the four labeled autonomy conferences some of you would call Power Four. That group receives the greatest level of attention. One of the encouragements from our presidents during our time in Destin was that we should gather the four commissioners and two presidents from each of those four conferences to talk about our future as we may have a different role in the NCAA. We face different issues at the state or federal level.

In fact, all that's happening around higher ed, those are important dialogues and, I think, an indication of the recognition we all must work together.

We also announced a year and a half ago a relationship, an advisory council, with the Big Ten. We've had two in-person meetings of our athletics directors and a number of video conferences involving the full advisory council, and



then subgroups, sometimes of presidents and chancellors and some of athletics directors.

We had to slow down a little bit because we've had some key personnel changes among members of that advisory council, but I can assure you we will be back in conversation as we move forward.

As it related to the settlement, I thought it appropriate to use a bit of a metaphor for running a marathon. I have run and finished 41 marathons in my lifetime. It's been a while, but I do remember the importance of getting it off to the right kind of start. That doesn't mean you feel great in the first two miles, nor does it mean, transitioning that metaphor, that everything works perfectly in the first two weeks of settlement implementation. There's been plenty of naysayers in the last 14 days, but the settlement went into effect July 1st, and we're here July 14th while working through historic and transformational change.

We're in the middle of change, and in the middle of anything significant, it will get messy. That doesn't mean you leave. In a marathon it doesn't mean you step off the course because myself, as poorly as I may have felt sometimes after two or three miles, recall that those moments might actually produce the best efforts.

The burden of making a new system work is certainly on commissioners and conference offices, but the responsibility is shared with our campuses and our campus leaders, and that's recognized in this league. We still have to work through the implementation, but the burden is shared by presidents and chancellors, athletics directors and coaches. It's also shared by those around our programs.

I've asked repeatedly in conference meetings, if we don't want any limits or any structure, just let me know. Then the phone stops ringing.

But over and over again in meeting rooms, the desire has been for a structure. So we are implementing a structure even with some bumps in the road. We need to commit to that structure. We need to be willing to make that structure work.

We also know that we are continuing to work with members of Congress, and we welcome that interest and the ongoing dialogue in Washington to support our Congressional engagement. This isn't about preserving the status quo. This is about providing clarity and the opportunity to build a future with opportunities in healthy support.

On that last note, we continue to be proud about how we

have adapted as a league. I would offer as a group in Division I to better support young people in their endeavors.

Pretty interesting to listen to the Major League Baseball draft and hear the number of college athletes, for example, taken by MLB. Major League Baseball understands the support, the education, the emotional development, the medical care, the nutritional education, the financial education, the coaching, and the competition provide a better prepared athlete for their teams. Those are our realities, not just for those taken in a professional draft, but throughout our programs.

So as we think about our work with Congress, we want a future where we have national standards, where we're able to play national championships on an equitable basis and support healthy economic opportunities for student-athletes.

Last week we saw the bipartisan introduction of the SCORE Act in the House of Representatives. That's an important moment. I think what's happening in college athletics is a nonpartisan issue, but using the typical nomenclature, to have members of both of our major political parties willing to step out and introduce the SCORE Act is a positive step.

Now, I remember School House Rock, right? I'm just a bill, yeah, I'm only a bill, I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill. So congratulations; we have a bill on Capitol Hill that is sitting and requires a great deal of more work, but I think the bipartisan effort represents an indication that college athletics, just as it does in football stadiums every Saturday can bring people together for conversation, and we hope the restoration of national standards for college athletics.

On the topic of eligibility, for decades we became accustomed to college athletics being focused on an undergraduate degree seeking experience. Now through a combination of institutionally requested and NCAA-granted waivers, followed by lawsuits related to transfer eligibility, a number of seasons of eligibility, and the length of time commonly referred to as the five-year clock for that eligibility period from enrollment to completing competition, people are remaining as college athletes longer, probably as evidence that it's a good experience, and the entry points as a result for high school athletes are being reduced.

My guess is you have to return to the early 1900s. Literally, if you go to the first quarter century and look at some of the practices around college sports, you start to see the same things that we are seeing today -- an older group of college athletes, constant movement without a lot



of oversight, and questions about whether there are real academic standards that apply.

As the world changes throughout college sports, we have to hold on to some values that are at the center of what we do on our academic campuses. We need to invite young people into higher education with the goal of moving them from adolescence to adulthood. We need to require unapologetically a person to make meaningful progress towards a degree, and if they don't make that meaningful progress, then simply understand they won't be able to participate in the athletics experience.

We have to make sure there's an entry point for the next generation of leaders and athletes who aspire to participate in college athletics following their high school experience. As I mentioned common standards and national standards before, there is a need to return to a common standard for athletics participation. It's embedded in the undergraduate educational experience that helps foster a college-going culture to the next generation who seeks to enroll and participate in college athletics, all while requiring meaningful academic progress leading to a degree, not subject to the whim of requested or granted waivers, and not resulting in legal decisions that will vary from courtroom to courtroom.

Transitioning from eligibility to the NCAA Tournament expansion in basketball, in general we are supportive of expanding both the men's and the women's basketball tournaments. Nothing in college basketball is static. Tournament expansion is certainly worth exploring. As last season showed, the Southeastern Conference is going to be fine whether the bracket expands or not.

We had a record 14 teams selected to participate in the NCAA men's basketball tournament, after what is, without question, a historically successful regular season. We had 10 teams, tying our own record, selected to participate in the NCAA women's basketball tournament.

We're going to be fine, but we think there are enough quality teams to make this growth appropriate. Now, to be clear, we support expansion, but you just don't jump into it. So if there are reasons from a broadcast point, financial point, logistics point, or competitive realities that don't support expansion, again, we're going to be fine. But in general, I think this is the right direction to at least explore.

Speaking of expansion, I felt the first year of the 12-year College Football Playoff was a success. That doesn't mean everything was perfect, and there are certainly opportunities to improve. But what happened through the 12-team College Football Playoff is we brought teams into the conversation at a time when they would have been

talking about their bowl game. We brought teams into the National Championship conversation so the young people on those teams had that National Championship competition access point.

I think the recent modifications by the College Football Playoff to adjust the seeding to be consistent with the selection committee's rankings is entirely appropriate given the adjustments to conference membership that have happened nationally since the 12-team concept was first introduced in June of 2021.

Those of you with us in Destin will remember a lot of speculation going into that meeting, but what came out is we think growth beyond 12 could be positive and should be pursued. There's also a belief that the process for selecting teams to participate in the College Football Playoff can be updated and improved itself.

That's where my earlier reference to our discussion at the June management committee meeting of the College Football Playoff was encouraging because we talked about selection committee protocol. We talked about the analysis of strength of schedule and a possible new metric under the label of strength of record. Each of those is consistent with our observations out of our spring meetings.

Much more work is needed, and more needs to be understood. We have to see the homework, if you will, but the discussion and the direction of the discussion is viewed positively from our perspective within the need for timely decision-making, which then lets me jump into the football schedule to be used in the Southeastern Conference in the future.

So as you write in common about our approach to our football schedule, let me give you a few just quick hits that you are free to use. No intellectual property claim here. It is absolutely, fully, 100 percent correct that in the SEC we play eight conference games while some others play nine conference games. Never been a secret.

Second, it's also correct that last season all 16 members of the Southeastern Conference played at least nine games against what you would label "power opponents." We had several that played 10 of their 12 games against power opponents. Some conferences have that, some don't.

The same will be true this year. We have Washington State, and we're obviously transitioning in the Pac-12 that's included in that group, and we again have several of our football teams that have 10 of those power games embedded in their schedule. I don't believe there's anyone looking to swap their conference schedule and its



opponents with the opponents played by SEC Conference teams in our conference schedule, be it eight or nine.

I handed out a bunch of stats that created a stir in Destin that showed there is a rigor here that is unique. In the SEC we're not lacking for quality competition among our 16 football teams, but we're going to continue to evaluate whether increasing the number of conference football games is appropriate for us. As I've said repeatedly, understanding how the CFP will evaluate strength of schedule and even strength of record is critically important in our decision-making.

As I conclude, as I mentioned within my remarks, we're living through a transformational moment across college sports. In fact, if you take a step back and go look at the iterative change over time, I don't think there's been a time in the last hundred years where so much change is in front of the college athletics enterprise as exists right now. It's actually amazing and exciting to consider the importance of the time during which we lead and serve.

Let me be clear. From my perspective, college athletics is not broken. College athletics is not broken. It is under stress. It is strained. The answers we seek are tied into the complexities that have been referenced over time.

I went back and read my remarks from this podium or others over the last few years, and pretty consistently I've identified the challenges ahead with some of the decisions that we have to make. I don't think the answers come from courtrooms completely. They don't come from commentators or commentary. They don't come from those outside sudden experts with their newest idea.

Those of us in higher education embedded in college athletics know the intricacies of what's in front of us, and we all have to continue to adapt and have adapted as we seek to provide life impacting opportunities and lifelong memories for young people across our nation.

If you watch the college football landscape change across the Southeastern Conference, we remain both proud of what we achieved and excited about our future. That future is not something we wait for. It is something we seek to shape. We look forward to the year ahead with new opportunities, with new challenges, with certainly a set of new frustrations, with new faces, new results, and new hope.

Before we engage in our usual tradition of questions and me deciding whether I provide answers, I'd like us to take just a moment and reflect back. We have a place here for Bob Holt. Bob would usually be the first question asker in the room. He lost a little bit of quickness over time. And

also those I mentioned a moment ago and those in some of the bigger tragedies around our country.

(Moment of silence).

Okay, Kevin.

Q. Commissioner, every time I hear one of these coaches talk about the House NCAA settlement, they refer to listening to the advice of their lawyers and their administrators. I'm curious if you guys have any meetings as a league to help your teams kind of see this course, to continue the metaphor of this marathon?

GREG SANKEY: Yes, we have water breaks on marathons, if those are meetings. We provided updates leading into decisions, and the difficulty for us is you cannot implement the settlement until there is a settlement.

I've used a subgroup of coaches. We actually sent a note out to gather our coaches for another educational setting next week. We had video conferences with athletics directors, presidents and chancellors last week. When I was here for the College Football Playoff National Championship Game in Atlanta -- it was kind of lonely because I didn't have a team -- but spent well over an hour on a video conference with our women's basketball coaches, we've done the same with our men's basketball coaches, and we use our meeting cycle regularly.

The fact that change was coming, I think, was well presented. The elements of the change that would be central to a settlement, I think that was well presented. It is the intricacies of implementation where we are running rapidly in the midst of the race to make sure we provide the most relevant and most current information. Some of that's kind of time bound by working through a process with the plaintiffs and with the court.

Q. The clear public disagreement between the College Sports Commission and the collective association about what the rules seem to be, do you have an opinion on that, or how are we going to rectify that?

GREG SANKEY: We from the College Sports Commission think we're operating sufficient with the settlement terms. We'll have the right kind of communication with the authors of the letter and communicate and educate on why we think we have the right perspective to begin with.

Q. When do you anticipate having the format of 2026 football schedule finalized?

GREG SANKEY: First of all, I spent a long weekend in

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Charleston a few weeks ago, and it was my first time to walk around downtown, visit Fort Sumter, play Bulls Bay, and experience Folly Beach. I didn't buy a newspaper while I was there, it was my four days away, so I owe you.

I've been careful about giving dates. I said repeatedly I learned during COVID that you want to use your time. It won't linger terribly much longer. We have to make decisions about the '26 season and adjust. If we're going to go to nine games, then there have to be games moved or rescheduled. If we stay at eight, probably a little easier on that part of the logistics. Once we make a decision in the conference office, we're pretty much ready to go. If you go back to when we made our last decision, it was in Destin, and two weeks later we had opponents out. Shortly thereafter, we were prepared with dates and sites sort of thing.

Q. Commissioner, you've talked about the differences in the playoff models, and a lot of people have speculated on what's best for college football. When you talk about best, what would be some of the bullet points that you'd want to get out of the ideal College Football Playoff format should it expand to 16 teams?

GREG SANKEY: Well, you're binding me to a 16-team playoff, but I'm going to walk you back. So I'm on record of participating in a decision process that 12 was the right direction, and that took years, plenty of ups and downs. As I said, the middle is messy, in a marathon it was messy. In that consideration, I think it worked well. Some of the changes happening around us that may create some competitive balance raise the question of expanding.

I've always been, always been a fan of there are no allocations. Like take the top 8 back in 2019, when people were talking about expanding. Take the top 12, I was an advocate for that. In fact, went back through with colleagues this spring. I could take the top 14, top 16.

We have agreed -- I think last week there was some misunderstanding communicated about a memorandum of understanding. So in that memorandum of understanding, the top 5 conference champions have a role. Unless you're going to go tear up the MOU, which maybe some other people want to do because of their concerns about the decision-making authority, but very clearly in that memorandum of understanding is granted to the combination of the SEC and Big Ten. Ultimately we have to use that authority with great wisdom and discretion. But unless people want to tear it up, we're going to have 5 plus 7, 5 plus 9, 5 plus 11.

As I understand doubling down -- that was one of the phrases last week. That's part of the gambling experience,

as I understand -- you always want to have a really good set of cards. You want to have a good hand to play, right? I think we have the best hand to play. We're going to operate consistent with the MOU. There's an allocation of those 5 spots, and I guess we'll continue to debate whether expansion beyond 12 is appropriate for the College Football Playoff.

Q. With the format for 2026 set, could it possibly be another two-year fix, or would you like it to be a longer term?

GREG SANKEY: I generally like to get out of the football scheduling decision questions, so that suggests a longer term would be better. One of our learning experiences from our expansion to 14 and we had two years and then 12 years, and our discussion now is perhaps look-ins every so often would be wise. So while you may want to answer it once and for all, I do think there's an expectation that we'll at least have look-in opportunities should the schedule change.

Q. Given the long history of revenue sharing, now that we're like two weeks in, what's been the early reports from your members as far as any concerns, complaints, or consensus?

GREG SANKEY: There's consensus about concerns and complaints. How's that? Yeah, anything new is going to create questions. It's not constant and overwhelming from all 16, but it's a continuing process.

I think the freak-out factor is a little bit high. In other words, somebody writes something, and people freak out. That doesn't mean it's accurate. All the conversations about, hey, maybe the Twitterverse isn't maybe the best resource for information, or X as it's known. There's a great deal of trust that we've built with our members, so we can walk through questions. Where we don't have answers, we'll go seek those.

Keep in mind that we're still in the process of implementing policies, and that's defined in the settlement with the plaintiffs and potentially the Court oversight. So there's a process to be involved. I do think it's a reminder of the importance of continuing communication, and as I indicated in another answer, we'll keep adding points of communication as we go through this change.

It's one of those, again, COVID lessons that you have to change your operating rhythm. So maybe rather than quarterly meetings, you're in monthly meetings. Rather than monthly meetings, you're in biweekly meetings to either give an option for questions or conversation or provide information.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. There's some interest to what Commissioner Yormark and Scott Draper said last week in Prescott about developing their brand internationally. They went as far as to say they're looking at playing multiple games, not just in Dublin, but in more than one sport. As the revenue increases and the growth in revenue become more and more important in conference, we've talked about this before, what are your views on the SEC expanding the brand internationally?

GREG SANKEY: I'll go back and share some thoughts I've probably shared over time. One is the strength of our conference is based on our communities. That may not be the same for others, but if you look at the 16 cities that host our universities, the football stadiums, the infrastructure, and what happens on a gameday weekend, it's absolutely magnificent, second to none.

With that said, this may build some of my credibility with you, I sat once with the Lord Mayor of Dublin to talk about playing football games involving SEC teams. We've had interest. When you take a football stadium with 100,000 fans and the economics around that football game being played in that stadium and that community and then you transfer those someplace else, it's a lot easier to do that if a program's attendance is 20,000, 30,000, or their football stadium is that size. So there are some economic realities that weigh against just doing that.

Personally, I'd welcome that chance, and we'll continue to explore opportunities, but I'll go back to the importance of college football in our region, in our states, and in our communities, and the foundation and strength of our conference fundamentally is built on those communities.

I also think we do a pretty good job internationally on our own with just drawing interest because, doggone, it's compelling. We are not boring and dull, I can tell you that.

Q. When you talk about the Big Ten and the SEC having control over the future format, what will it take for those two leagues to come to a consensus and avoid a stalemate, and how close are you and Tony Petitti to doing that?

GREG SANKEY: Well, I would never give away how close we are to doing something in a meeting. I think Tony and I spoke 4 out of 5 days last week. Jim and I either talked on the phone or communicated 3 out of 5 days last week.

We had a different view coming out of Destin around the notion of allocations, if you will, and I think you'll probably hear that again from our coaches. The Big Ten has a different view. That's fine. We have a 12-team playoff, five

conference champions. That could stay if we can't agree.

I think there's this notion that there has to be this magic moment and something has to happen with expansion and it has to be forced, no. I think, when you're given authority, you want to be responsible in using that authority. I think both of us are prepared to do so.

The up front responsibility in this, maybe where some of the confusion lies, is we have the ability to present a format or format ideas, gather information, see if we can all agree within that room. We don't need unanimity. Ultimately, if not, there's a level of authority granted to the Big Ten and the SEC together, but there's a lot to that. It's not you just show up and pound your fist and something happens. I hope that that type of narrative can be reduced, but we'll keep talking. We all talk a lot. Probably too much sometimes, right?

Q. You mentioned private equity in your opening remarks. We know you came out against several PE-backed super league proposals last year. Moving forward, is the SEC open to exploring any PE money or capital injections coming into the conference?

GREG SANKEY: Two things in there. My comments about other ideas, and they're embedded subtly, is what I have not seen is the analysis to these ideas that's provided to our everyday operation. That's one of those disappointing realities for me. So we have to do that internally, like how much money flows out of the college system into the financial backers. Where are the ifs that are needed? If this can be achieved and if that can be achieved and if that can be achieved, then they might be able to achieve what they're talking about.

Some of these proposals, you always see the most positive outcome, and when you ask, well, like what's the downside? What if you don't hit all of those mile markers, what then happens? There's not a lot of answers provided.

What we're dealing with is not like a law school class hypothesis or a finance project for somebody's MBA, this is real life, and we're seeing that happen over the last two weeks.

That's my observation. Just clarity on the first one. I've had those meetings. I've had outreach on a continuing basis. They bubble up from time to time. The question, what problem are you trying to solve and what's the substance of the solution? What's the downside? What if you don't achieve all of those mile markers.

For us, I had a conversation with some of our membership about outside financing ideas as late as last week. We



have been probably 2 1/2, 3 years into visits with banks, with private equity, with venture capital. I mean, you could go down the range. Private capital, that's another phrase that's been used. That's not been the right direction for us. We've not seen the concept that works.

That doesn't mean we won't consider opportunities. If there are opportunities for mutual benefit, those would pique our interest. But the notion of just jumping to something because there's a pot of money there seems an uninformed direction, and simply taking propositions where there's not the kind of clarity around what if you don't meet your high end predictions, what's left then? I think those are things that continue to weigh heavily on our mind.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports