

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Allegiant Stadium

Brett Yormark

Commissioner Press Conference

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: This is our first Media Day as a 16-team league. There has never been a better time than right now to be part of the Big 12.

We are truly a national conference, in ten states, four time zones. And all eyes are now on the Big 12 for all the right reasons, and I think it's safe to say we're more relevant now than ever before.

Before I look forward, I'd like to recap where we've been for the last 12 months. Since our last Football Media Days, we added the four corners and solidified ourselves as one of the top three conferences in America. All four schools are here with us today, and you will hear from them over the next few days.

I'm incredibly excited about what they bring to our league. Last season, Big 12 football fans packed the stadiums. Six Big 12 teams averaged 100 percent in home capacity. All schools average over 88 percent capacity.

There was incredible late-season excitement heading into the Big 12 Championship weekend. During our football championship, we introduced the first-ever halftime show with Nelly, featuring our school bands. I think that was a great example of how you infuse the old with the new. And our ratings peaked at halftime, and we brought in a more casual audience to experience that halftime show.

We had a record-tying nine teams in bowl games, and we had the second-best win percentage.

We saw success across Olympic sports, in basketball too. Men's basketball had a record-high eight teams in the NCAA Tournament. Women's basketball had seven teams in the tournament, in fact, the most since 2013. Six NCAA titles were won in sports such as cross country, tennis and track, to name a few. What led to our success on the field was, of course, our incredible student-athletes.

And speaking of our student-athletes, I have the privilege



today of recognizing this year's Bob Bowlsby Award winners given to student-athletes who competed at the highest levels both on and off the field this past year.

Our first winner is Bella Folino from the BYU women's soccer team. Let's give her a hand, please.

(Applause)

Our second winner is David Carr from Iowa State Wrestling.

(Applause)

Bella and David exemplify what it means to be a Big 12 student-athlete, and on behalf of the Big 12 community, I'd like to congratulate them both.

Off the field, 2024 was a success as well. Sponsorship business grew by 79 percent. Our ticket business grew 23 percent. To start the year we launched a partnership with Allstate focused on Big 12 women's sports. We celebrated last year's four additions with Big 12 Homecoming events with a partnership with Sports Illustrated, and we'll do it again this year with our new additions.

We launched the first-ever Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being Advisory Group. We celebrated cultural moments, including a basketball partnership with the Muhammad Ali Estate for Black History Month supported by ESPN. In addition to moving this year's Media Day to Las Vegas, we doubled down on Kansas City as the site of our basketball championships for years to come, as well as added women's soccer.

We continue to plant our flag in Dallas by extending our football championship at AT&T Stadium and Globe Life Stadium for baseball.

We launched a PSL program around our men's basketball championship with our partner legends, and we teamed up with the NFL to launch Big 12 Pro Day. And we will continue to build our partnership with the NFL as we as a Conference continue to innovate and grow.



When I took this position, I said I wanted to make sure our conference was on the consciousness of current and future student-athletes. In an effort to do so, we needed to be more active on social media. We are now the second-most followed conference on Twitter and Instagram and, in fact, have had over 250,000 follower growth since December of 2022.

It was certainly a great year both on and off the field for the Big 12. But I often say, I'm happy but not satisfied. People keep asking what's next? Our newest brand spot answers that. We are. Let's take a look.

(Video)

(Applause)

So as you can tell, 2024-25 will be a very exciting year for the Big 12.

On the football front, we will be the deepest conference in America. Every week will matter. I'm going to say that one more time. We will be the deepest conference in America and every week will matter.

We have star power in parity. We boast some of the top players and coaches in the game. November will be incredibly exciting, and we will brand it as a race to the championship.

Beyond football, the best conference in basketball got better. Our Olympic sports got stronger, adding four programs with an incredible history of excellence. We recently made some changes across our competition team. Our Olympic sports leadership team is one of the best in the country. Scott Draper is now overseeing all Olympic sports in addition to his role managing football.

Dayna Scherf will oversee women's basketball. It's the first time we've ever had anyone in that role. And given the growth of the game, we needed to double down.

We hired Lisa Peterson from the Pac-12 as our new VP of Olympic sports.

Student-athlete support continues to be at the forefront of what we do. We have over 70 current and former student-athletes participating in this year's Olympic and Paralympic games. And I plan on being in Paris to support them all.

This year we'll see Big 12 create new opportunities for our student-athletes on and off the field. Last week, we launched the Big 12 Beyond Borders program, a cultural studies and leadership program, for our student-athletes.

We will introduce a new governance group to give a greater voice to student-athletes. In fact, we took that idea from the Pac-12.

The league will assist schools with student-athletes' storytelling to help build their brands. We will introduce original student-athlete storytelling content this year, named 12 for 12. We will also continue to work with the NCAA to protect our student-athletes from the negatives that come with sports betting, especially prop bets.

Lastly, I am thrilled to announce the launch of the Big 12 Alumni Council. The Big 12 has produced some incredible talent over the years, both on and off the field.

This council will provide a former student-athlete perspective for the league as we continue to grow. And we will officially announce all the members of the council tomorrow. Clark Williams and I will be chairing this council, and we are thrilled to do so.

As I think about our commercial business, our top priority is growth and creating value for our member institutions. I often refer to our league as a mature startup. This means our brand can be younger, more progressive, and innovative, compared to some of our peers.

Our value creation must be done in a strategic way, and that value creation starts with ESPN and Fox. We are taking an innovative approach exploring new TV windows and giving fans more access to our programming.

As we build our brand, we will continue to build our business. We will not stumble into this new era following settlement. In fact, we will be aggressive and very proactive.

We will push at the NCAA level. In fact, I love what they recently did with on-field logos. I've been very vocal with the NCAA to push for making commercial patches permissible for officials' uniforms, similar to what the NBA has done. I've spoken to our football officials, and they are in favor of it, and I'm optimistic that will happen soon.

From a conference perspective, we are exploring all options. Two years later, I guess you could say we're still open for business. Naming rights is one, private equity is another.

We are looking to expand our PSL program into our football championship game for 2025. We will be infusing more LED signage across our marquee championship events, creating new visible signage and revenue streams for our member institutions.



Today, I'd like to announce officially we're partnering with Microsoft for tablets on the field and for the coaching booth for the upcoming football season. We continue to explore Mexico for the Big 12. We are currently looking into pivoting Big 12 Mexico towards women's soccer or baseball for our official launch.

As we continue to enhance our commercial portfolio and our narrative, this morning we launched a conference-branded channel through our new partnership with TuneIn Radio. I want to thank the executives today from TuneIn. Our football coverage will be greater than ever before thanks to this new partnership with TuneIn Radio.

Additionally, we anticipate announcing a FAST channel platform in the near future to also enhance and broaden our narrative. Both give us an opportunity to extend our reach.

Obviously I'm very passionate about where we've been and where we're going. But I'd be remiss if I didn't touch base on the current state of affairs in our industry.

We are going through change, but I would rather call it a necessary reset. In 10 years, I think we look back at this period as a positive moment in collegiate athletics history.

I live my life by the value equation. Those that create value deserve to be rewarded. I speak for many when I say enhanced student-athlete benefits are a good thing, and that's what the recently announced settlement will provide.

I've spent a lot of time with our P4 peers and Charlie Baker developing our path forward. It's been a cooperative effort, and I want to thank them for their partnership.

There is still a lot of work to get done we'll work on clarity on Title IX, roster limits and enforcements. And settlement will require continued conversations on the Hill so we can codify the settlement agreement and gain clarity on student-athlete employment.

I've had a lot of conversations with student-athletes about what their desired goals are, and certainly enhanced benefits are at the top of the list, which we are addressing.

As we enter this new chapter, I can assure you Big 12 schools will compete at the highest levels and they will continue to invest.

We've been preparing for this moment for a long time, and as commissioner, I will continue to create value for our members in order for them to be as competitive as

possible.

This is no time to press pause. We must continue to be bold and aggressive as an industry. The Big 12 will always be ambitious because that's who we are. I know there's a lot of pressure on a lot of people right now, but I will leave you with this: Pressure is a privilege.

Before I let you go, I want to bring someone who is very special up on the stage to join me. Joni [Lehmann], who many of you know, has been with the Big 12 for over 26 years, and she will be retiring after this week.

We wish her only wonderful things in the next chapter in her journey, and I'd like Joni -- there she is. I'd like all of you to please stand up and give Joni a round of applause as we thank her for all her service and her dedication to the Big 12.

(Applause)

Q. Your last comment triggered a thought as we move into this new era of paid college athletes. With that, a lot of the discussion revolves around the NFL model and a salary cap. Do you envision student-athletes unionizing so they're exempt from antitrust and you are exempt from antitrust, therefore creating a salary cap?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: It's a great question. We have not discussed a salary cap. I think settlement provides a very crystal clear future and path forward for our industry. It provides incredibly enhanced benefits for our student-athletes, and as I said during my comments, that's what they want and that's what settlement delivers. I appreciate your question, though. Thank you.

Q. 14-team playoff has been something that's been talked about a lot as it was agreed to starting in 2026. It was surfaced in this offseason that the SEC and Big Ten are talking about making those two first-round byes exclusive to the SEC and Big Ten. What are your thoughts on that proposed model and hopes going forward?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: We've got Richard Clark here today, the new executive director of CFP. Feel free to ask him any questions.

From my perspective, we're just getting into this new format of 12 schools, and we've got to see how that works. And we're very excited about what that new format looks like. Obviously the Big 12 will be represented by one team at least, possibly more, probably more. And we'll have to



see how it unfolds, but from my perspective anything beyond this year is just speculation.

Let's get this year right. We're all blessed to have games on campus in that first round. I'm looking forward to it, and we'll see where it takes us moving forward. But thank you for your question.

Q. Connected to the previous question, two conferences have sort of flexed their muscles and made a lot of -- not decisions, but clues that they're really trying to power play. What is the Big 12 doing in response to that?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I wake up every morning, I think about one thing, the Big 12 being the best version of itself. Everything else doesn't really matter. And if we take care of business, we're going to be just fine, and I'm a firm believer in that.

As I said earlier, we're more relevant now than we've ever been. We're a national conference. We've got 16 great brands. We're going to be the deepest football conference in America. We'll be well-represented in the CFP.

Everything else is just speculation. I'm really, really focused on just making sure the Big 12 is the best version of itself, and not only have we had a great 24 months, but we continue to get better. But thank you for your question.

Q. In regards to the way you've managed to capitalize off, let's be honest, the choices that the Pac-12 made and didn't make, how are you working on becoming a bigger power figure in the West Coast now that that conference is essentially gone? And have you worked with the WWE in regards to their NIL program because they've had like the Cavinder twins and worked with TCU and other people in regards to that?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: We've got a great relationship with WWE and excited to continue to expand that.

As it relates to the West Coast, this is a great example. It's indicative of our appetite to move a little west with some of our tent-pole events. Being in Vegas is critically important to us. Even before last year's realignment. I said we had to be in Vegas and a little more west. This is the entertainment and sports capital of the world now. It's incredibly important for our brand and business, and we'll continue to explore opportunities to take some of our tent-pole events, champion events more to the West Coast if the opportunity presents itself and if it makes sense.

Q. With the permissive cap for revenue sharing that's

being laid out in the House settlement, some schools, including the Big 12, have already set the revenue share at the maximum level. My question is how quickly will Big 12 schools need to get to that maximum for the conference to be as competitive as possible?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I'll leave it up to the schools to dictate that pace, but I'll tell you, as I said in my opening comments, we as a Conference, which means our 16-member institutions, are going to continue to compete at the highest levels and will continue to invest in the areas that we need to in order to do so.

Very confident about how we're going to spend and invest over the coming years. But obviously, to the pace at which it moves, I'll leave that up to the schools.

Q. You mentioned private equity as part of your opening statement. I'm curious, one, what does the model look like in college sports that makes sense? And, two, how does the Big 12 kind of work with private equity in a way that doesn't create major long-term liabilities especially?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I'm not going to get into too much of a conversation on private equity, but as I said earlier, we're exploring all options. I do believe that given where we are, the industry, having a capital resource as a partner, makes a ton of sense.

That's really how you conduct good business. I really believe that. And if you see where private equity is kind of making a path into professional sports, at some point in time it's going to come here into intercollegiate athletics. We're exploring what that might look like. And a structure and a model of what that looks like is going to be critically important so that we're not compromising the long-term future of the conference.

And we have surrounded ourselves with subject matter experts as we vet out the possibilities and whatever we do is going to have to benefit the Conference, both short term and long term. Provide optionality for our schools. And we're not there yet, but we are exploring the different options and the different structures that best suit our conference and our schools.

Thank you for your question.

Q. When you took over the Conference, you mentioned Day One about building partnerships? Are the partnerships moving at a pace that you're happy with or are they not moving fast enough?



COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: You're talking about just generally?

Q. Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: Listen, we're moving at a great speed. When I got here, people warned me prematurely that things in collegiate athletics don't move that fast. I can assure you, working with our ADs and our board, at least in the Big 12, that hasn't been the case.

If you think about what we've been able to accomplish over the last 24 months, it's been incredible, and I tip my cap to our ADs and our board for wanting to be positively disruptive, to wanting to break boundaries, create new partnerships that could create value for the conference both short and long term.

We're moving at a great pace right now. Excited about all the things that are in front of us. And as I said earlier, we can't pause. We've got to continue to be bold and aggressive but thoughtful at the same time.

Q. You mentioned a lot about the future of this conference, and obviously this is the first year in a while that Texas and Oklahoma have not been here. What do you think the four brands that you added this year kind of do to make up for that difference, and just kind of the outlook for the future of this conference as a whole?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I've been saying it for a year now, but the four corners was the "A" scenario for us when we thought about realignment. Big brands, great markets, engaged fan bases, both academic and athletic excellence.

As I said earlier, we got deeper and better in football, we got deeper and better in basketball, and we got deeper and better in Olympic sports.

So it's been a win for this conference, and I'm thrilled and excited, on August 2, to officially welcome the four corners.

As I said, they're here today, obviously. And I think we're in for something pretty special as a conference. I really do. Thank you for your question.

Q. You talked about bringing some of the tent-pole events out west and talked about going to Mexico for soccer and that kind of thing. So my question is do geography and convenience still matter in terms of travel budgets and that kind of thing?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: No, convenience matters, certainly does. That goes into the consideration set as we're exploring different options.

think coming to Vegas for this event was critically important. Unfortunately, there was a scheduling conflict at AT&T. And we wanted to provide a great experience, not only for the media, but our student-athletes. And I can assure you, I've been stopped at least a dozen times this morning by student-athletes saying "Thank you for getting me to Vegas."

In many respects, it's their first time here. That's part of the puzzle also. That's what we have to deliver, is a great experience for our student-athletes. We're doing that here during Media Day, and we'll be very thoughtful about the future, making sure we're not inconveniencing people.

But there is a benefit to doing different things, and we have to embrace change. But thank you for your question.

Q. You made the point that you felt the Big 12 was the deepest football conference in America. You made that point twice. I'm sure that will make some waves in the SEC country. Wonder if you could get a little deeper in why you feel this league is the deepest football league in America this year?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I think there's a lot of parity. We've got 16 great coaches. We've got a lot of star power. When you think about the quarterbacks, you think about the running backs, many of our programs have been building over the last couple of years. So I think it's only natural and appropriate for us to think that way right now.

We were a very deep conference last year, but we got deeper now with the four corner schools. So I'm expecting great things from our schools this year. I think last year we underperformed a little bit, candidly. I don't expect that to be the case this year. Every week will matter, and as I said earlier, November we'll brand the month as a race to a championship because I think it's going to be really tight this year and it will take until towards the end of the season for us to determine who will show up at AT&T Stadium for that championship game.

Thank you for your question.

Q. Earlier you spoke about 16 strong brands. Is there any number that's too big for a conference in terms of its membership?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I hadn't really thought about that. I often get asked about expansion and what's next. I'm really focused on the current composition of our conference. We've expanded a lot. My wife told me the other day, when you took the job you had 10 schools. You have 16 now. That's in a very short period of time, in

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less than 24 months.

So we've got to make sure as a collective group we're reaching our potential. So I haven't really thought about what's the right number. I don't know if it's really about a number. I think it's about the right fit. It's about the value of potential school might or might not bring to the conference.

But right now we're focused on 16. We're focused on getting this right, and I'm really excited about our future as a 16-team league.

Q. I was curious, with the state of Big 12 Basketball and the news with the Big East's new television package, what does that mean going forward? I know you have a deal with ESPN and Fox for a while, but as far as the future with potential of a basketball-only television deal.

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: Well, first of all, as I mentioned earlier in my comments, we got stronger at basketball. As good as we were, we got stronger. That being said, when we did our new TV deal, we gave ourselves optionality to think about the next cycle, and we'll be back in the market in January of 2030. And we have a lot of optionality. Do we go back into the market as we've historically done, or do we bifurcate football from basketball?

Only time will tell. But I'm bullish on the whole deal. I'm bullish on football. I'm bullish on basketball. I'm bullish on Olympic sports, and everything we do now sets the tone for that moment in January of 2030.

And with the help of ESPN and Fox, they will grow our brands, and they will grow our narrative and best position ourselves for that moment. Thank you for your question.

Q. You mentioned you expect we'll look back in 10 years at this period of change as a positive one for college athletics. Do you have a sense of how long the college athletics scene might be in this fluctuation? And do you have certain priorities, certain questions you would like to be answered, whether that's Title IX or other issues that are maybe priorities for you? I know there's a lot of questions right now.

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: As I mentioned earlier, Title IX, what enforcement looks like, roster limits, those are all things we're vetting out, myself and my power four commissioner colleagues. There's a lot of work to be done.

I don't have a crystal ball, but I do think settlement provided

a lot of clarity going forward. And we needed clarity. And we needed to understand what the path forward was going to look like, and I think we have that now.

That being said, there's still a lot to work out and crystallize, but I'm excited about the future, and I'm excited about how our schools are going to embrace the future and invest in student-athletes and invest in their programs so that we can be the best version of ourselves.

So hopefully that helps you with your question, and thanks for being here, by the way.

Q. You noted in your opening remarks that value creation begins with ESPN and Fox, and you're exploring new TV windows. What do those windows look like, and how is ESPN and Fox helping shape the narrative of the league?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: Listen, all I can say on that is Saturdays, there's a lot going on on Saturdays, as we all know. A lot of competition. So the question is, are there new TV windows we can explore where we can highlight, elevate and amplify our football programs maybe a little differently? And we're exploring that. There's nothing that we have vetted out specifically that I want to discuss just right now, but we're working at it, and we'll see where it takes us.

But we've got to kick the tires and figure out other windows that make sense and provide great engagement for our fans and great exposure for our programs, and it's incumbent upon me to explore it, which I'm doing.

Q. You mentioned Las Vegas a couple times in your comments, and I'm just curious, the current Las Vegas Bowl status is now with the SEC and Big Ten. The Pac-12 was previously affiliated with it. Utah is just named to the 2027 Vegas Kickoff Classic. The committee that puts those two games on has done a phenomenal job since it's grown and continued to progress here now at Allegiant. What are the talks ongoing, and are you looking forward to possibly being affiliated on an annual basis with the Las Vegas Bowl?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I'm confident at the right time we will have a formal affiliation with the Las Vegas Bowl. This market is critically important. Scott Draper is working on that. But I'm very comfortable and confident in what that outcome will bring for our conference. We need to be here in Vegas for all the right reasons. I said it earlier, entertainment and sports capital of the world. So critically important market for us in the future.

Q. These initiatives that you've taken to grow the brand internationally outside of the United States have been something historic, but what can you encourage the schools to do individually to help grow themselves outside of the United States as well?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: Well, listen, we're working on that all the time. As I've said before, Mexico and Mexico City specifically are very important for us, and we as a conference realize the benefit that having a presence there makes and why it makes sense, and we're going to lean in probably to launch that platform with women's soccer and/or baseball.

Ireland, as you know, there was an announcement where two of our schools are going to be playing there next August. So we get some exposure in that part of the world. And who knows what comes after that.

But I do think we want to glamorize and elevate and amplify our brand both domestically and internationally for all the right reasons, not only just for student-athlete recruitment, but just enrollment for our member institutions. Critically important for us.

Q. You mentioned the focus on the 16 teams that are here now. How important is the cohesion among those ADs and the unity to the overall future of the conference?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I think it's critically important. We have a like-minded group, which I think is paramount, and our ADs like each other. They compete, but they like each other. Which is perfectly fine. You can compete and lean on your colleagues for advice and guidance, and I see that from my perspective.

There's great rapport amongst our ADs. It's a great fit. I'm blessed to be working with each and every one of them. I think continuity makes a lot of sense amongst the ADs. I'm hoping that that presents itself over the short and long term. But we've got a great group of ADs, and they're working hard to build the Big 12, our brand, our business, and I'm excited to be working with each and every one of them.

Q. Commissioner, you talked about having a Pro Day with the NFL, conference-wide Pro Day. Have you given any thought of having any type of combine for potential high school recruits for Big 12 schools, kind of highlight the conference and also give some exposure to high school athletes, particularly football players?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I haven't addressed the high school combine or anything like that. I would defer to my head of football, Scott Draper, on that.

I will say we had a wonderful experience at Big 12 Pro Day in the partnership with the NFL. It was something that we had thought about for quite some time, and it finally came to fruition. It was a great experience for those student-athletes, and we will be doing it again this year as well with the NFL. So we're excited about that.

Q. You talked about branding and the importance of branding. You talked about social media. Obviously College Football 25 is due to be out, and that's going to give more exposure. But what are some of the other ways you feel you can have a strong solid brand for the Big 12 to be able to be in the conversations like we talk about the SEC and the Big Ten and so forth?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: Well, I mean, I think -- I spoke to it earlier -- working with ESPN and Fox is critically important for us as they elevate and amplify and they story tell and create the right narrative. Our partnership with TuneIn gives us greater relevance and a greater narrative than we've ever had before. We're exploring a FAST channel, doubling down on social media and engaging with current and future student-athletes in places where they are. Critically important.

This conference never had a CMO. We've got a CMO here for the first time, the first time in 26 years, and he's doing an incredible job -- Tyrel [Kirkham], many of you know him -- in building our brand so we can build our business behind it.

As I said earlier, we are more relevant today than we've ever been in our history. And a lot of that is because we're building our brand. Thank you for your question.

Q. In your opening remarks, you mentioned the fusion of old and new, and you haven't really spoken about that in any of these questions. What does that look like, and how are you going to continue to fuse the old generations and the new generations coming forward?

COMMISSIONER BRETT YORMARK: I think we've done a lot of that so far in our first 24 months. If you think about how we're using music to tell our story and how we've infused that and contemporized our championship events and did a halftime show, obviously a great example of taking a little bit of the old and having that marry with the new.

People were concerned what were going to happen to the school bands if we did a halftime show. We found a performer, Nelly, one of the best there is, that wanted to

choreograph that halftime with our student bands, and it made for a wonderful experience for them.

And you'll see us do more and more of that moving forward. But I think it's a balancing act. We can't do away with the legacy and the heritage of where we've come from, but we have to modernize. We have to contemporize, and I think there's a way to stitch the two together. And we have shown how that can be done successfully, and we'll continue to do that moving forward. Thank you for your question.

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