

## Oh, Give Me A Home.....

Written by Mike Kelly  
Saturday, 05 May 2012 12:47

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And as the song goes, where the buffalo roam, and the deer and the antelope play. Unfortunately, it's not that simple for Appalachian State University. The Mountaineers, who won three consecutive national football championships from 2005-07 in the Football Championship Series, are looking to strut their stuff at the Football Bowl Series level. But when, and if that even happens, is the \$64,000 question at the moment.

Oh, the Apps want to move up. And who can blame them. College athletics, especially football, has become a multi-million dollar business. And many ASU fans are anxious for the Mountaineers to make the move and take their place among the elite programs at the FBS level. But realistically, it takes a lot of careful planning, and a lot of money to be competitive at that level. And Athletics Director Charlie Cobb has the right frame of mind. He knows better than anyone that this project is more of a marathon than a sprint.

And while teams are jumping from one conference to another like fleas, ASU remains in a stationary position, waiting for the right opportunity. The voice of the Mountaineers, Associate Athletics Director David Jackson said it best on Friday during the mid-day show on AM 1450, WATA Radio.

"This is not just a football decision," he said. "This is something that will affect the entire university. And our school will do what is right, and what is in the best interest of the school as a whole."

And many fans argue that ASU is ready to make the jump, and who can blame them. ASU has the facilities, and it has a huge fan base, especially in some of the major markets in North Carolina (like Winston-Salem, Asheville, Charlotte and even the tri-city area in Tennessee). But apparently, some people don't think so. The primary argument seems to be the school's location.

"People talk about where we are located," Jackson said on WATA. "But we are a huge tourist area. Look at our ski resorts in the winter time. A lot of people come up here to ski. The road crews do a great job clearing the roads, so we can get around up here. And this is a beautiful area. It attracts a lot of people year round. But again, Charlie Cobb and the committee that's involved with this project are looking at this very carefully, and with a lot of patience. Again, we want what is the best situation for the university to be in. And that means whether we move up to the FBS level, or if we stay at the FCS level."

"We've probably got to do a better job of communicating our proximity to large media markets and the depth of our alumni and fan base," Cobb said. "And, I think as much as anything, the accessibility to Boone. Fifteen years ago it might have been a legitimate concern of how to get in and out of here, but the reality is, it's no different than a lot of other FBS member locations in terms of getting in and out. I think it's getting people to see what's here. We've got to get potential suitors to see our campus, to see our facilities, to see what fall Saturdays mean here, to see a nationally ranked baseball team, to see the support."

Conference-USA just picked up five teams this week, most recently Texas-San Antonio and Charlotte. And C-USA seems very attract to ASU, especially with rivals like Marshall and East Carolina in that league. And there's also talk that the Sunbelt Conference will step up and possibly expand. But where does that leave ASU? And the most important question of all still lingers---is there a suitor that will invite the Mountaineers to join in on the fun?

"When you look at some of the leagues that are out there, I still think there is uncertainty," Cobb said. "Look at Conference USA right now and it's 13 teams. I can't imagine that's the final

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holding pattern, and certainly there are schools between now and two or three years that might decide they want to do something else. There are still a number of conversations to be had. "Ten years ago, 20 years ago, conference expansion was based on competitive programs. When that criteria is changed and it becomes more about markets and national dollars, the TV dollars especially, that's the challenge. We feel like we've embraced the competitive pieces. Now it's a matter of embracing the marketing piece. I think everybody involved wants Appalachian to be successful, to be the best we can be. I think the challenge internally is that it's a strong commitment for the university and we need to see what opportunities are out there and make sure everybody is comfortable with what we're pursuing."  
Amen to that Mr. Cobb. Amen to that.