

An UpDate From Charlie Cobb

Written by Charlie Cobb
Tuesday, 08 May 2012 11:15

In an effort to help with some of last week's conference expansion developments, I want to share some thoughts with you from our perspective. Potential membership in Conference USA is one of the scenarios that Appalachian has been pursuing since the athletics feasibility committee made their recommendation last August. As you recall, the committee recommended that Appalachian seek membership in a conference that sponsors FBS football and the Board of Trustees approved that recommendation this past September. The committee's mandate was that a new conference must create geographic rivalries and make financial sense for us. Also, while other institutions have the ability to use student fees as the major investment in growing athletics on their campus, our committee made a strong statement that student fees would only be a portion of our athletics funding model.

Feedback that we have received throughout this process has been overwhelmingly positive with regards to our University's and athletics department's infrastructure. Our academic programs are top-notch, our financial base is strong, the data put forth by the athletics feasibility committee is solid and our facilities, fan support and success on the playing fields and courts are unparalleled among our peers.

A hurdle we face is one that is completely out of our control - our campus's distance from a major population center and its potential effect on television revenue. In an effort to diffuse this concern, we have shared that while we are not in the heart of a large TV market, Boone falls in the coverage areas of four top-100 markets that serve over 3 million homes combined. We also have 103,000 living alumni and 76,000 of them live in the major population centers of North Carolina. We have shared that the widening of US-321 and US-421 and the ability to charter flights in and out of Hickory and Wilkesboro Regional Airports have made our campus easily accessible by ground and air. We have shared that we have made over \$60 million in facility improvements since 2006 and that we would have finished fifth in C-USA and second in the Sun Belt in football attendance last year. I hope it is obvious to all, but the reality is that potential TV revenue dictates much of the movement that we are seeing in college athletics. Conferences that have recently lost programs based in major media markets have looked to replace them with programs located in major media markets.

Conference realignment is not a sprint and remains very fluid. Additional realignment is inevitable and I can assure you that as the carousel continues to spin, we will continue our efforts to explore and pursue options. It is our hope that with this wave of expansion and the reality of actual competition still several years away, conferences will start to look at the core value of geographic rivalries (specifically competitive success, the accessibility and affordability for teams and fans to travel, ticket sales, actual television and internet viewers, regional marketing partnerships and other fan-based revenue streams) as an important component to complete their membership.

While some are disappointed in last week's developments, the primary reason that we are even in this conversation is because our fans have responded in tangible ways by purchasing tickets, attending games and supporting the Yosef Club. Because of you, "The Rock" is one of America's best gameday environments. Because of you, the Charlotte Observer recognized us in 2005 as having the "Carolinas' Best Division I Football Program" and this was before our three-consecutive national championships. Because of you, our football program is second only to Boise State in wins over the past seven years.

While we diligently explore options, we ask you to continue to support your Mountaineers as

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passionately as you always have. If you can, please make time to support our conference-leading and nationally ranked baseball team over the final month of the regular season or come to Boone later this week when Appalachian softball competes for an NCAA Tournament berth by hosting the Southern Conference Softball Championship. Also, be sure to purchase your season tickets for the fast-approaching football season - kickoff is less than four months away!