

Appalachian State University Chancellor Dr. Kenneth E. Peacock announced on Wednesday that the University's athletics programs will join the Sun Belt Conference, effective July 1, 2014. With the move to the Sun Belt, Appalachian State's highly successful football program will transition to college football's highest level, the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS).

"I am proud that Appalachian has this opportunity to compete in the Sun Belt Conference," Peacock said. "Our student-athletes have earned the opportunity to participate at this level of collegiate athletics and we welcome the new academic and athletic relationships that will develop as a result of this partnership."

Formed in 1976, the Sun Belt Conference is one of 11 conferences that sponsors NCAA Division I FBS football. Since 2007, the Sun Belt ranks fifth out of the 11 FBS conferences in postseason bowl game winning percentage, ranking ahead of three "Big Five" leagues in the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Pac-12 and the Big Ten as well as Conference USA, the Mid-American Conference and the Western Athletic Conference. The Sun Belt reached new heights on the gridiron in 2012, when it finished with the most non-conference wins in conference history and sent a league-record four teams to bowl games.

Success is easy to find in other sports as well. The 2012-13 men's basketball season saw the league put together its best non-conference RPI in four years and send two teams to the NCAA Tournament. Together, the Sun Belt's men's and women's basketball teams combined for a record-tying seven postseason appearances this season. The league is also known for placing multiple baseball and softball teams in the national top-25 rankings and NCAA postseason on a regular basis.

Through it all, Sun Belt student-athletes excel in the classroom as well. A record 1,793 Sun Belt student-athletes earned a GPA over 3.0 and were named to either the SBC Academic Honor Roll or SBC Commissioner's List in 2011-12. The 2011-12 academic year marked the third time in the last four years that the academic honors were doled out to 1,700 or more student-athletes.

The Sun Belt continues to utilize television to grow and promote the league and its member institutions. In 2012, the conference signed a new multi-year agreement with ESPN, Inc. that results in unprecedented national coverage for the league. Appalachian State fans can look forward to seeing more Mountaineer teams playing on national television on ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPNU. ESPN has also televised the conference's men's basketball championship game for 32-consecutive years, marking its longest affiliation with any conference in the country. Additionally, the conference's regional television partnership with Comcast/Charter Sports Southeast (CSS) and Cox Sports Television (CST) enables live telecasts of Sun Belt events to reach millions of households. The addition of volleyball, baseball and softball to the conference's television package has resulted in more national and regional television exposure for the league than at any time in its history.

Appalachian State joins current Southern Conference rival Georgia Southern, which also accepted an invitation to join the Sun Belt on Wednesday, as the conference's newest members. The Sun Belt is currently slated to have 12 full-time members when Appalachian and Georgia Southern join the ranks for the 2014-15 academic year — Appalachian, Arkansas-Little Rock, Arkansas State, Georgia Southern, Georgia State, Louisiana-Lafayette, Louisiana-Monroe, South Alabama, Texas-Arlington, Texas State, Troy and Western Kentucky.

ASU To Join Sun Belt, FBS in 2014

Written by Mike Flynn

Wednesday, 27 March 2013 15:25

All but Arkansas-Little Rock and Texas-Arlington will field FBS football programs.

“This is a great day for the Sun Belt Conference as we are very proud to have Appalachian State join us,” Sun Belt Conference commissioner Karl Benson said. “This is an institution with teams that compete at the highest level and an administration committed to providing a quality education to its students.”

Appalachian State joined NCAA Division I in 1970 and has been a member of the Southern Conference since 1971. The Mountaineers have competed at the NCAA Division I FCS (Football Championship Subdivision) level since 1982 and won an unprecedented three-consecutive national championships from 2005-07.

Appalachian has proven that it can compete against the best competition that college football offers with seven victories over FBS opponents since 1982, highlighted by its historic 34-32 triumph over fifth-ranked Michigan in 2007, which marked the first time that an FCS program ever toppled a nationally ranked FBS opponent.

Appalachian State’s athletic success is not limited to the gridiron. Appalachian’s men’s basketball program has won three Southern Conference North Division championships and made two postseason appearances in the last six years. Women’s basketball has won three of the last four Southern Conference regular-season titles and earned four-straight postseason berths. Baseball is coming off a 41-win season that included winning the SoCon championship and advancing to an NCAA Regional final. The Mountaineers’ perennially powerful men’s and women’s cross country and track and field programs have combined to win 98 SoCon team championships and hundreds of individual titles, including two-time NCAA 1,500-meter champion Mary Jayne Harrelson (1999 and 2001).

As a result of its all-around athletic success, Appalachian has won seven-straight and 32 of the last 35 Commissioner’s Cups as the Southern Conference’s top all-around men’s sports program and nine Germann Cups as the SoCon’s top all-around women’s sports program.

In the classroom, each of Appalachian State’s 20 athletic programs boast a multi-year academic progress rate score of 947 or higher while its football program’s APR of 982 earned it a 2012 NCAA Public Recognition Award. Of the 14 NCAA Division I FCS football programs to receive Public Recognition Awards in 2012, Appalachian’s was the only to offer a full allotment of 63 football scholarships and the lone public institution (eight of the 14 recipients hail from the Ivy League).

The scholastic performance of Appalachian State student-athletes mirrors the academic excellence of the University. A comprehensive, regional university with nearly 18,000 students, Appalachian State is ranked No. 3 among the top public master-degree granting universities in the South. It aspires to be a model 21st-century, nationally recognized university combining the best characteristics of liberal arts and research institutions by resourcefully blending teaching and scholarship.

“This is a great day for Appalachian State University,” Appalachian State director of athletics Charlie Cobb said. “Being invited to join the Sun Belt Conference is the culmination of decades of hard work and achievement by thousands of Appalachian student-athletes, coaches, University leaders and supporters.”

“While we will always be grateful for and proud of our 40-plus-year association with the Southern Conference and what we achieved in more than 30 years in NCAA Division I FCS, we are excited for the challenges that lie ahead in the Sun Belt and FBS.”

APPALACHIAN STATE AND THE SUN BELT — FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q) When will Appalachian State begin competing in the Sun Belt?

A) Appalachian State officially joins the Sun Belt Conference on July 1, 2014 and its teams will begin competing as Sun Belt members during the 2014-15 academic year.

Q) What is the process of transitioning from NCAA Division I FCS to NCAA Division I FBS for Appalachian State's football program?

A) Appalachian State football must complete a two-year reclassification process from FCS to FBS. Among other requirements, Appalachian State must raise the number of football scholarships it offers from 63 to 85 during the reclassification period. In the first year of the reclassification process (2013), Appalachian State will play a full Southern Conference schedule but will be ineligible for participation in the NCAA Division I Football Championship. Appalachian will also be ineligible to officially win the Southern Conference title, as the league would forfeit its automatic berth in the Division I Football Championship if its champion were ineligible to participate in the postseason. In the second year of the reclassification process (2014), Appalachian State will play a full Sun Belt Conference schedule and be eligible to win the Sun Belt championship but will not be eligible to participate in a postseason bowl game.

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Appalachian State becomes bowl-eligible in 2015.

Q) Will Appalachian State's other sports be eligible for Southern Conference championships and NCAA postseason berths in 2013-14?

A) Yes. All of Appalachian State's sports besides football and field hockey will compete fully in the Southern Conference in 2013-14 and be eligible to win conference championships and earn automatic bids to NCAA Championships. Field hockey will continue to compete in the NorPac Field Hockey Conference and be eligible to earn its automatic berth in the NCAA Championship.

Q) What will conference affiliations be for Appalachian State's three programs (field hockey, men's soccer and wrestling) that are not included in the 18 sports sponsored by the Sun Belt Conference?

A) The expectation is that field hockey will continue to compete in the NorPac Field Hockey Conference and that men's soccer and wrestling will continue to compete in the Southern Conference.

SUN BELT CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Founded: 1976

Commissioner: Karl Benson

Headquarters: New Orleans

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Member Institutions (12 total — effective July 1, 2014): Appalachian State, Arkansas-Little Rock*, Arkansas State, Georgia Southern, Georgia State, Louisiana-Lafayette, Louisiana-Monroe, South Alabama, Texas-Arlington*, Texas State, Troy, Western Kentucky
Sports Sponsored (18): Baseball, Men's Basketball, Women's Basketball, Men's Cross Country, Women's Cross Country, Football, Men's Golf, Women's Golf, Men's Indoor Track and Field, Women's Indoor Track and Field, Men's Outdoor Track and Field, Women's Outdoor Track and Field, Women's Soccer, Softball, Women's Swimming and Diving^, Men's Tennis, Women's Tennis, Volleyball

* Arkansas-Little Rock and Texas-Arlington to not field football programs

^ Appalachian State does not field a women's swimming and diving program