

July 20, 2015



An Interview With:

BIG 12 COMMISSIONER BOB BOWLSBY

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Good morning, all. Appreciate you being here. Appreciate your coverage throughout the year.

We worked on getting the British Open up on the monitors. We didn't want you to be distracted, but I have it on my monitor up here. So if you want to know what's going on, let me know.

I'm going to spend a little time talking about three topics today. One a little bit of reflection over the last couple of years and all that's gone on in intercollegiate athletics, a little about Big 12 initiatives that we have undertaken over the last year and going forward, and then the third is, of course, the football season.

Before we get going, I want to just take a minute to wish my colleagues, Britton Banowsky and Mike Slive, well. You all know them. They're both leaving their positions for different reasons, but they are two of the really terrific people, great leaders, and wonderful gentlemen in the business. I want to wish them both well. Having Greg Sankey come in as one of the leaders in our business is certainly a very positive thing too. So I wish him well.

This year has been interesting, challenging. It certainly was a wild football season last year and ended in a way that was hard for us to accept. But it is what it is. We felt like we had a terrific football season last year.

A lot has happened over the last 24 to 30 months. Probably first among those things is the autonomy work that has been accomplished. The five high-visibility conferences now have a lot more control over our fate. There is obviously wide speculation on what the agenda is and what kinds of untoward things we might do with intercollegiate athletics.

But the fact is we really have some issues and some challenges that we need to have a little

more control over. We feel like our five conferences are, in large measure, the face of what the public sees as intercollegiate athletics. We certainly bring a lot of equity to the processes and to the competition.

So we feel like that's an appropriate step, and it was accomplished almost as it was laid out. The new council is in place. The new board is in place. The subcommittees are now in place. My involvement is going to be mostly with the football oversight committee.

We have some issues that are still before us. The issues of transfers and transfer waivers were among the outstanding issues that the steering committee of presidents did not deal with. They tossed that back to the new governance system along with a consideration of our enforcement environment. And those two initiatives are still ongoing, but we've made progress in both of them.

As you look at the things that are really significant about the last couple of years of college football playoff, it's really a remarkable thing. There have been many who have advocated for it for, well, decades, probably, if not many years. I think there are probably those who disagree with current format. Generally speaking, three out of four Americans think it's a big improvement over the BCS. Most think that we ought to go bigger, which I don't think is going to happen anytime soon.

I think that we are really settling the outcome of college football. We sought to keep the postseason strong. We sought to enhance the month of September from a competitiveness standpoint. And we wanted to retain what we think is the best regular season in all of sports, the months of October and November in college football. And I think all of those things were accomplished.

More people watched the two semifinal games and the final game than any other sporting event in the history of cable television. It was a big success. And I say that given the disappointment

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that I already noted earlier.

I think more than anything else we've improved the lives of student-athletes. I think moving to the full cost of attendance to multiyear grants, to degree completion grants, transitional health care, the opportunity for various meals programs, the lot in life of student-athletes has improved dramatically over the past two years, and I think it will continue to improve going forward. It ought to always be our priority.

The other thing that is going to be happening, the work has largely been done, and the implementation date is August 1st of 2016, and that is the implementation of the new academic standards and initial eligibility standards. It mandates more core classes. It mandates a higher grade point average to be immediately eligible. It will bring us a better prepared college student and student-athlete. I think that it will call upon students to undertake that preparation earlier and to put themselves in position.

I think all of these things that I mentioned have been big steps forward for college athletics. And the reason I mention it is because I think it's very easy to spend our time doing nothing but looking forward, and the fact is much has been accomplished in the last two or three years.

In fact, I think our forums that the Big 12 has hosted have been a big part of shaping that dialogue and shaping that agenda. We have done three forums with five separate panels, some of the real thought leaders in the entire intercollegiate athletics environment. We are committed to doing more of them. They are not scheduled at the present time, but I think you can expect that we'll do at least one more during this year and perhaps more than that.

We have tried to make them issue specific. We don't want to do them just to be doing them. But when we have things to talk about, we want to get people to disagree in their vantage point and get them in a room and have a thorough vetting of it. I think it's made for some good theater, and it's made for a deeper understanding of the issues. Bob Burda and Ken Luce have led the efforts for us on the forums, and they've done a great job with it.

Essentially, what we have arrived at, I think, in the last couple of years is a refocusing of the principles that should be guiding intercollegiate athletics within the framework of higher education. Raising initial eligibility standards and better preparing the student-athlete, putting

student-athlete needs ahead of other financial considerations, continuing to teach teamwork and leadership and time management and perseverance and resiliency are all things that we really believe in.

And yet there are lots of opportunities to be cynical about our stated principles and what appears to be actions that are inconsistent with those principles.

I want to show you a couple of quick video vignettes that we're going to be running during the course of the season. I think one of them is a football 30-second spot and the other one is a more student-athlete-centric 30-second spot.

Our goal in higher education and intercollegiate athletics, despite all the noise around it, is to help kids graduate and succeed in college and in life. Whether you buy that or not, that's why I've been in this business as long as I have. Foundationally, I think that's where most of my colleagues are too.

So let's run the two videos, and then we'll get back to additional comments.

(Video playing.)

You'll see a lot of the "Champions for Life" moniker in the months ahead. Our staff will be doing 100 to 150 stories throughout the course of the year on student-athletes. I want to reiterate that one out of every five is a first-generation student-athlete and a first-generation student. That's really remarkable. Athletics continues to be the best source of opportunity for a lot of kids that have never had access to college.

You'll hear a lot about Champions for Life. You'll see a lot of it. We will tag a good deal of what we do during the coming year around that slogan, and you'll see it in a wide variety of formats. You'll see it in our 30-second spots during our games, but you'll also see it in longer formats in conjunction with a number of our media partners.

There are a number of ways in which we are going to enunciate the message, but the short message is these are students. They are not employees. And it's that simple.

Specific to football and the larger football environment, we've got a lot of work to do. And I say that from the chairmanship of the football oversight committee. There's a lot that's right about the game, and you'll hear a lot that's right about the game in the hours today and tomorrow.

But the fact is we have a lot of work to do.

We have a lot of work to do around time demands. We have a lot of work to do around the recruiting environment, signing day, contact windows, oversigning, transfers. There are growing concerns about the summer environment, the seven-on-seven leagues, the camps environment and the recruiting processes that go along with that.

We have a good deal of work to do to become a little more conversant from a rules standpoint on the impact of technology. Obviously, the world has changed since we did a full rebuilding of how we communicate with student-athletes. The growth and stability of the game is going to be a continuing and ongoing subject because, although there are almost 800 schools in Divisions I, II, and III playing college football, 70,000 college football players, the numbers in Pop Warner and the other developmental programs are down 15 percent year over year each of the last four years.

There are some troubling signs, and mostly those signs are around safety issues. And I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

Relative to Big 12 football, we continue to remain very strong. Last year we were 95 percent capacity at a time when some areas of national attendance are declining. I don't know that the college football game has ever been any more popular than it is right now. I think the aspirations of the college football playoff were in large measure realized, and they reflected themselves in lots of people watching games, especially during those last five weeks when it seemed like every weekend was an elimination game of some sort.

But having said that, as a league, we got left out. We need to be in a constant improvement mode. We need to play better, and we need to do what we can to get better in every single way. This year we've undertaken some initiatives that I think will help us to get better in ways that are all around the competitive aspects of it.

Obviously, that resides mostly with coaches and student-athletes. But beyond that, we think we have had a tremendous officiating environment, and we think our games are fairly contested. I think Walt Anderson is the best coordinator in all of college athletics, and we have been innovative through his work in managing the pace of the game and bringing on an eighth official, which is now the standard for the game. I think it's certainly reflective of the pace of the game and the speed with which teams like to play.

But we undertook an off-season officiating review that included coaches, directors of football operations, athletic directors and others because we felt like we wanted to get better. If we weren't optimal, we wanted to do what we could to improve. It's always a daunting task to take something that is exceedingly good and try and make it better.

I think we've accomplished that. I think the process was very good. We reported out to our coaches and our ADs in the spring, and I think the confidence level is higher than it's ever been. I think that the understanding among all the parties is better than it's ever been, and I think it positions us very well to go into this football season.

We also undertook a sportsmanship initiative in the off-season led by Ian McCaw at Baylor and a small group of ADs and others. We have had some concerns about inappropriate chance in our venues with mostly students, but to a lesser extent others in the stadium. We've had some recent situations of fan misconduct, and we've had some issues with court storming and field storming and the like.

We have engaged people on campus in order to take care of the first two that I mentioned. And relative to court storming and field storming, we're taking a little different approach than others. We are choosing to manage it rather than prohibit it. That is a daunting task, there isn't any doubt about it. We think that, properly managed, those kinds of celebrations can be a lot of fun. If you've got a football stadium that's got an eight-foot wall around it, you're going to have to take some special precautions to make sure people aren't jumping off of it and hurting themselves.

More than anything else, it's up to the home management to manage the game environment, and first and foremost among that is getting the officials and the teams and the coaches and the participants in the event safely off the field and to their locker rooms and making sure that they can safely and efficiently dispatch their responsibilities within the game environment.

But beyond that, home management can do what they want to do. As long as they manage it in a sports-like manner and ensure the safety of the participants and the officials, we're going to take a wait-and-see approach on it. I do have broad prerogative in terms of reprimands and fines and a full array of considerations that will allow us to manage it if we disagree that it hadn't been

managed properly on campus.

We think that sportsmanship is a really important element of what we do. We also believe that the best parts of college athletics and the things that really differentiate us from other kinds of athletics is the tradition and the historical rivalries and the regularity of competition and all those things that go along with it.

While I was at Stanford, I met a guy by the name of Bob Williams. Bob is now 94 years old, and his time is largely taken up working on sportsmanship initiatives on a nationwide basis. Bob's a Navy grad. He was the head of the corps of cadets at one time, and he's all about traditions. He and I worked together to do some things with regard to the Cal-Stanford game, where the teams stayed out on the field and stayed out for each other's alma maters and they had a post-game congratulatory ceremony and those kinds of things.

There were those who thought it was sort of quaint and old school, but the more I've thought about it, the more I realize that a lot of those kinds of things are fallen by the wayside, and they are really what distinguish the collegiate experience from the professional experience or some other experiences.

I think they may be old-school ideas, but I think one of the things we haven't done as well as we should have in intercollegiate athletics is we haven't differentiated ourselves for what it is. People don't come back to college football games because of the sports competition exclusively. They come back for the college experience. And that's a differentiation that has, in some measure, gotten lost along the way.

The other thing that we have spent a lot of time on, and it's first and foremost in all of our minds, and that is player safety. We've made some rule changes. We've made some officiating changes. We have spent a lot of time on protocols for return to play and return to learn because they're not the same thing. You may start feeling good enough to be out walking around and maybe exercising, but you're not clear-headed enough to be back in the classroom. Those differentiations and determinations can only be made by medical professionals.

We also are spending a lot of time trying to participate in the research that goes into subconcussive impacts and the importance of repetitive use injuries because there is some evidence that there is concern not just on that concussion that you get during the game or during practice, but the cumulative effect of

helmet-to-helmet contact over a long period of time.

So we have put in place a rule in the Big 12 that gives unchallengeable authority and prerogative to the medical professionals. You may have remembered that at the NCAA convention last year we opposed the national rule that put in place the stipulations around concussions because we didn't think it went far enough.

We have also taken another step that we don't -- because we don't think the national rule goes far enough. The national rule is three incidents of helmet-to-helmet full contact with live tackling and the like three times a week, including a game. Three times including the game, or a scrimmage if you didn't play in the game.

We have adopted -- our ADs just adopted this, that we will go with a two-contact-per-week rule that will be the game plus one other day of full contact, or a scrimmage for those that didn't play in the game and one other day of full contact.

We believe it's the right step, and we hope it will become the national rule. Even if it doesn't, we think that that's the right way to conduct our practices. It's another way in which we're a little different, but our ADs have felt strongly about it and our coaches have supported. That's our rule moving forward.

Relative to the Big 12 2015 season, there isn't a lot of suspense right now. TCU and Baylor got all the first-place votes. Everybody sees them as the strength of the league. They also dominated the preseason individual honors. But just a reminder, since 2009 we've had six different schools out of our ten win the conference championship. We've got seven great Bowl partnerships. This is the first year of what started out as the Champions Bowl and now will be contested between us and the SEC in the Sugar Bowl. So that ought to be a great celebration for us.

We are the only league that plays a full round robin. We go into this year again with no championship game. The deregulation process is moving its way through the system. I fully expect that the postseason rules regarding having to have 12 members and regarding having to have six -- two six-team divisions and play round robin in the division, I think those will be deregulated.

I think we'll have the prerogative at some point in time to consider and implement a playoff game if we choose to. But our ADs have been

very thoughtful about it and our CEOs have been very thoughtful about it, and we've put in place a tiebreaker that will ensure that not only do all of our schools play each other, but the title isn't going to be decided by who you didn't play.

So whether we end up with a championship game down the road or not, we aren't going to have one this year. We think that full round robin is the right way to determine it. The last four years, the last day of the season, our champion was decided. In fact, just as a reminder, the two highest ranked teams that met on Championship Saturday last year were No. 5 Baylor and No. 9 Kansas State. In terms of rankings, it was the best matchup on the board. Some of you, I know, have November 27th circled for a Baylor-TCU game, but I can assure you there will be a lot of great games between now and then.

Aspirationally, we don't want to just be in the playoff. I think our league has always been about aspiring to win national championships. We were 2-5 in the Bowl games last year. We had a couple of really good showings, but that's not satisfactory. We want to win all of those Bowl games. We've got a great Bowl lineup, and there isn't any reason we can't be competitive in every one of those games.

And, in addition, eventually we'd like to lead the nation in graduation rates as well. We can't let that get lost in the process because, in the end, the opportunity to come in, have a great collegiate experience and move on with your life is really what it's all about. Less than 1 percent of our football players nationally -- of course, it's higher in our league -- but nationally it's 1 percent ever get a chance to be on a roster, and if they do, that opportunity lasts about 3.3 years.

We are about higher education. We are about helping kids move from 18-year-old adolescence to 22-year-old adulthood and in the process get a great education and have a terrific athletics experience.

So we're excited about the coming year. We'll end up with some amazing games. I think the reason college football is so exciting is because it's so unpredictable. So I'm excited that this day is here. I'm excited for the first weekend of the football season. I'm excited for camps to get started. I think it will be another terrific season.

So let me stop there and address your questions.

Q. The Big Ten television contract soon will be up. They get a new one and an



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expected bonanza. You had a great TV contract a year or two ago when you signed your new one, but the length of it, does that worry you that you might fall behind with the escalation of the way all the media rights are going?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: That's a great question. Actually, notwithstanding the Big Ten going to market, we feel pretty good about where we are right now because we're actually slightly shorter than everybody else. The ACC's is longer, the SEC put some years on their contract because of the SEC Network, and the Pac-12's is longer. So we're actually going to be to market before the others.

But you're right. It's still nine years away. There are some indications that the value of our football and basketball games, while it was terrific at the time we did it, is now sliding relative to the value of those same games from other leagues.

So we actually have a look-in on our contract with ESPN and Fox, and it doesn't give us an opportunity for a renegotiation necessarily, but it gives us a chance to look at the stipulations of the contract in light of modern circumstances.

So we'll do that at some point in time during the course of this year. And being able to attain optimal value is always something that's really important to us. I think your assessment of the Big Ten's opportunity is right on target. I think they're likely to do well in their negotiation.

Q. With regard to player safety and the Big 12 taking a stance, you're going to have two hitting days a week, don't you think that puts the conference at a decided disadvantage with regard from a competition standpoint -- tackling drills, hitting drills and things like that? Secondly, you mentioned the coaches were in support of this. Who if any football coaches were actually in support of less hitting?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: In support of what?

Q. Of less contact through the week. Nationally, they're going to have three hitting days, and you determined the Big 12 only have two.

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, what we determined was our guys weren't using them anyway. So I don't think they feel like they're

giving up anything, but you should ask them that. I think some of it is also style, and some of our guys don't even hit two days a week.

The other thing is there's lots of opportunity to be in helmets and shoulder pads without full contact. When I say full contact, that means taking people to the ground. So there's a lot of wear and tear that goes on during the course of the football season. I don't think that we're going to find that this is a disadvantage. In fact, I think you may find that you have a healthier team in the second half of the season.

The NFL has a rule that they only have 11 days of contact after the completion of their preseason camp. So if that's -- if they can get by on 11 days, we can certainly get by on twice that.

Q. Bob, I'll go ahead and ask you about Dave Boren's comments. Do you feel the league is at a disadvantage --

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: I lost the pool, by the way. I thought that would be the first question.

Q. Sorry. Couldn't get to the mic fast enough. Does it reflect a majority of school presidents, just one president, or how many?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, I don't know that I'm prepared to take a straw poll for you right now, but the -- first of all, it will be the president's decision. It isn't my decision. It isn't our athletic directors' decisions, although they'll certainly have input into it. But it's our presidents and chancellors that will consider it.

It is my understanding at the present time that the majority of our presidents and chancellors believe ten is the right number for us. There are those that believe we should get larger, and they feel strongly about it. There are those who believe we should stay at ten, and they feel strongly about it. And there are probably four or five in the middle who are persuadable one way or the other.

I think that's exactly where we're at. At the present time, I don't think there's critical mass for expansion. It will continue to be a topic about which we spend at least a little time at every meeting talking about it. But until that majority shifts, it's a purely academic conversation.

Q. (Off microphone)?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: I've always thought that I was personally at a psychological disadvantage. So I don't know that I'm threatened by that.

I don't believe we are at a disadvantage. Relative to the playoff, I don't think one year makes a trend. We were very close to having two teams in last year, and you really don't have to have much of an imagination to see how that might have worked out where we would have gotten one and maybe two without too much of a stretch.

So if we go another year and get left out and it appears to be systemic, we need to be mindful of it. That's why we've gone about the process of trying to get the postseason rules deregulated. We think that gives us a full array of options.

One year doesn't make a trend. I don't believe we're disadvantaged at this point, but that doesn't mean a disadvantage couldn't develop or couldn't be shown to exist, but I think it's the majority of our CEOs right now that believe likewise.

Q. On the same subject, this business of disadvantage, isn't it possible it could be a disadvantage if an unbeaten team loses a championship game in a conference final?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, you've all seen it more up close and personal than I have, but -- I think I'm right on these numbers -- I believe there were 11 occasions in the past where we had a team go into our postseason championship with a chance to contest for the -- contend for the national championship. I believe I'm correct in saying that that team is 6-5. So 50 percent of the time our best team was eliminated from consideration by losing in the championship game.

You certainly don't have that risk if you don't play the championship game.

Q. You talked a lot about scheduling here recently, about the need to pick up nonconference scheduling for teams. Are you confident that the schools will do that?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: We have proceeded as if it is -- we've had a lot of discussions about this among our ADs, and I know our coaches have talked about it a little bit too. I could capably argue either side of it from a mandatory standpoint because I think coaches need to have prerogative in terms of how they get their team ready. Some coaches believe a tough preseason does that best. Others believe a lighter preseason does that best. And I think we have to

respect those experiences and respect the prerogatives of individual coaches.

Having said that, there isn't any question that the nonconference schedule of each of our institutions affects the strength of each of the other members of our league. We can't deny that.

So I don't think it means that everybody has to play three top 20 teams in their preseason. I also think it doesn't mean that everybody has to play three that are FCS or in the bottom of FBS. So I think there's a happy medium there.

Our athletic directors have not chosen to make it mandatory. They have respected those prerogatives on an institutional basis. I think we will continue to have that conversation, and it's possible that we could get to a point where we need a little more structure around it. We haven't gotten to that point yet, but it's a live issue, and we know that the strengths of some are affected by the strengths or weaknesses of others.

So we're going to continue to talk about it. I suppose it's possible we would get to the place where we did something on a mandatory basis like some of the other conferences have done. We haven't chosen to do that yet.

Q. Just to follow up on that, when you talk with other conference commissioners, do you envision a day where it's just power five conferences playing each other? Because it seems like the power five conferences have done a very good job of separating themselves from the rest of the FBS.

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, I don't think we have any intention to separate ourselves from the rest of FBS or from the rest of college football. I think keeping the football championship subdivision strong, keeping the other five FBS conferences strong is in our best interest.

We have no desire to draw bright lines. Everything we've done with autonomy has been permissive in nature. We feel like we need to make rules that are binding upon us and that meet the needs of our programs, but we haven't said to anybody you can't do the same thing that we do. So I guess full cost of attendance is the best example of that.

I think that we are in a situation where we need some opportunity to be the masters of our own fate, but that isn't to put in place rules that put distance between us and everybody else. We just need to put in place rules that address the issues in our environment. And if others want to address

them in the same way, that's fine. If they want to try and address them in other ways, that's fine too.

But we're not trying to run anybody out of business. We're not trying to stop playing the other FBS schools or the FCS schools. I think that strong college football is strength for all of us.

Q. Staying with the cost of attendance, which is now between roughly 2,400 to 5,000, something like that, do you envision that number, the high end, getting even higher as we move forward with this?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: It's a great question, and I don't know that I have a great answer. There is some indication that the numbers have already crept. The office of financial aid on every campus is the place where these decisions are supposed to be made. There isn't supposed to be any athletics input into it. But I guess I'd be naive if I didn't think that there had been lots of conversations and perhaps there was some back and forth on that.

My estimation of what happens with that number is I think they're probably going to tend towards a mean. I don't think some institutions are going to go to \$12,000 because I think that's a number that's binding on everybody else at that institution. It dictates how much money you can borrow. It dictates how much Pell Grant you can get. It dictates what kinds of grant programs you're eligible for and what kinds of student assistance you can get. So it's a lot more than just the athletic environment.

So I think over time they will -- the bottom may come up and the top may either sit still or come down a little bit. But I think that it's likely that there are some built-in governors there. Time will tell.

Q. Bob, the SEC has prohibited, I guess, transfers of people who have had domestic violence incidents. Is that something you guys have had conversations about?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: No, we haven't really talked about it. In fact, I just became aware of that when I was reading Greg Sankey's comments from the SEC media days. I think it's something we will talk about.

The issue of kids with baggage, you can argue that nobody should be prohibited from being involved just because they make one mistake. On the other hand, kids that have histories don't seem

to have too much problem finding a place that they can go and play college sports.

I think it's a really good conversation to have, but it's not one we've had yet.

Q. Over the past decade, there have been three Big 12 schools that have competed in the national championship, and it's been a decade since a Big 12 school has won a national championship. Does that concern the conference at all? What do you think kind of has led that to happen?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Yes, it concerns us because of the aspirations that I noted earlier. We don't want to just participate in the playoff; we want to win championships. I think that's a clear enough aspiration. And we haven't been as successful as we would have liked to have been.

What do we have to do? We have to get better. We have to win big games when we have them before us, and we have to demonstrate by competition in the postseason that our conference has led us to be highly competitive at the end of the season.

There are as many Division I recruits in Florida, Texas, and California as there are in the other 47 states combined. All of our schools are recruiting heavily in Texas, and we have lots of competition here.

What do we have to do? We have to recruit better. We have to develop better. We have to play better. We have to win the big games when we have a chance to win the big games.

These things tend to be cyclical. I don't think that those things sit tight forever. It's easy to forget that, until Ohio State went through and ran the table in the postseason, everybody thought the Big Ten was having a fairly poor year last year. They hadn't won a lot of games, and yet the top end of the league is pretty good.

I think, likewise, the top of our league is really good, and I think all ten of our schools are really competitive. We just about every year have a big upset of some sort, and the fact that six schools have won our championship is indicative of the level of competition.

But that level of competition needs to have a cumulative effect, and we hope that we can do the things that are necessary to have that cumulative effect lead to success in the postseason, particularly in the playoff.

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