



BIG SKY ANNOUNCES ADDITIONS OF NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTHERN UTAH

OGDEN, UTAH (November 1, 2010) - The Big Sky Conference is privileged to announce that the University of North Dakota and Southern Utah University have accepted invitations to become core members of the Division I conference.

Both institutions received formal invitations from the league Friday, Oct. 29, advancing a process that began when the presidents of the nine current Big Sky Conference core universities approved expansion plans at their annual fall meeting on Oct. 20. Both institutions will officially join the Big Sky on July 1, 2012. However, representatives from both institutions will begin working immediately with the currently membership on scheduling, marketing, and other conference matters.

"The presidents wanted to position the Big Sky Conference as a major player in football in the West," said Big Sky Conference Commissioner Doug Fullerton. "But most importantly, we wanted the right kinds of schools. Our presidents have always been driven by adding institutions that fit with the schools we currently have. We've added two institutions that meet the criteria, and we've positioned ourselves to meet the visions of the presidents. We're building a new kind of FCS conference."

Monday's additions bring the future Big Sky to 11 core members and 13 football playing members. The Big Sky Conference is also on the verge of announcing the addition of the University of South Dakota as a 12th core member. The Big Sky will become a 14-team football league and split into two seven-team divisions. The Big Sky does not anticipate losing any of its current nine core members.

In September, the league announced that Cal Poly and UC Davis would join as affiliate members for football.

"The moves we've made aren't about protection," Fullerton said. "If the talk out there is true that playing at the FBS level of football is unsustainable for many schools, then FCS will play an even bigger role in the future. The Big Sky presidents want the Big Sky to be the first major player coming from the FCS ranks.

"We have to change a lot of mindsets," Fullerton added. "Every time someone from our division has sustained success, the national media believes that school has to move up to the FBS level, and that's not the case."

North Dakota and Southern Utah are the first core institutions to join the Big Sky since the addition of Northern Colorado on July 1, 2006.

"Today marks the culmination of many years of effort on the part of countless people committed to Southern Utah University and its future," said Southern Utah President Michael T. Benson. "We are delighted to accept a spot within the Big Sky Conference as a full member in all sports and thank the institutional presidents and chancellors – and Commissioner Fullerton – for their vote of confidence in SUU."

"We are excited to be joining the Big Sky Conference," said UND President Dr. Robert O. Kelley. "This is the best of all possibilities for the University of North Dakota. We will be competing with some of our comparable peers in higher education – schools that look and perform like the University of North Dakota."

Southern Utah, located in Cedar City, Utah, currently competes in the Great West for football and the Summit League for other sports.

Southern Utah's men's basketball team won the Summit League Championship in 2001 advancing to the NCAA men's basketball tournament. On Saturday, the Thunderbirds clinched their first Great West football championship.

Southern Utah has had 48 All-Americans in football since 1967, including 30 since the team moved to the NCAA in 1986. The Thunderbirds also field very strong cross country, and track and field programs. Southern Utah has claimed 28 combined Summit League track and field championships, including eight women's and eight men's cross country titles. Runner

Jesse Baumgartner earned All-America honors in 2006 when he finished third at the cross country national championships.

“This is truly an exciting day for Southern Utah University and the community,” said Southern Utah Athletics Director Ken Beazer. “I’m thrilled for our coaches, student-athletes and fans. We look forward to working with Commissioner Doug Fullerton and the Big Sky Conference, to enhance what already is one of the premier NCAA Division I FCS conferences in the nation.”

North Dakota began the transition from Division II to Division I in 2007, and will be eligible for all Big Sky and NCAA Championships in 2012-2013. North Dakota currently competes in the Great West Conference for most of its sports. Its football program won the Division II national championship in 2001, and was second in 2003. The Fighting Sioux won 24 Division II North Central Conference football championships.

The North Dakota women’s basketball program has captured three Division II national championships and 12 conference titles under the direction of veteran coach Gene Roebuck.

North Dakota also features one of the top hockey programs in the nation. The Fighting Sioux have won seven NCAA Championships, and play in the \$100-million Engelstad Arena, considered one of the finest hockey facilities in the world. The basketball programs play at the Betty Engelstad Sioux Center, which opened in 2004. The football team has played in the Alreus Center since 2001.

“(The Big Sky) is a very strong league, and certainly from a financial perspective it’s been a league that’s been producing significant revenue for its members, positioning the brand in a very strong way. But what I’m most impressed about is the conference commissioner. He not only has a vision, but he’s working it. It’s really going to be a pleasure to partner with someone that has an aggressive forward thinking attitude about the conference.”

The University of South Dakota figures to be the final piece in the Big Sky expansion. The Coyotes of Vermillion, S.D., also compete in the Great West Conference for football. South Dakota and North Dakota are formal Division II rivals in the North Central Conference.

Like North Dakota, South Dakota began the transition to Division I in 2007 and will be eligible for Big Sky and NCAA Championships starting with the 2012-13 season.

“We are negotiating with South Dakota,” Fullerton said. “They want to be part of the Big Sky Conference and we want them to be a member. They are just awaiting a final approval process. Approval processes are different at each school.” The Big Sky Conference formed in 1963 with six members. Four of those original members – Idaho State, Montana, Montana State and Weber State – are still with the league.

ABOUT THE BIG SKY CONFERENCE

League Headquarters: Ogden, Utah.

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The Big Sky Conference is an NCAA Division I Conference enjoying its 48th season of athletic competition. The league’s football teams compete at the Football Championship Subdivision level. The Big Sky is considered one of the top FCS conferences in the nation, having won five national championships. The league has put multiple teams in the playoffs 11 straight seasons.

Commissioner Doug Fullerton is in his 16th year leading the conference. Fullerton is a member of the NCAA Men’s Basketball Committee, the chairman of the Men’s Basketball

Officials LLC, and in 2003-04 became the first FCS commissioner to serve as the President of the Collegiate Commissioners Association (CCA).

Founded: 1963

The Name: On Feb. 25, 1963, the name Big Sky was adopted by the six presidents of the charter members as the name of the new conference. The name Big Sky originated in a novel written by the late A.B. (Bud) Guthrie of Great Falls, Mont., in 1947 entitled “The Big Sky.” Jack Hollowell, a former Montana advertising director, promoted the Big Sky theme for the Treasure State, and Harry Missildine of the Spokane Spokesman-Review called for the newly formed league to be named the Big Sky Conference in his column dated Feb. 20, 1963.

Charter members

Gonzaga

Idaho

Idaho State

Montana

Montana State

Weber State

Current members

Eastern Washington University (Cheney,

Wash.), joined 1987.

Idaho State University (Pocatello, Idaho)

The University of Montana (Missoula, Mont.)

Montana State University (Bozeman, Mont.)

Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff, Ariz.),
joined 1970.

University of Northern Colorado (Greeley,
Colo.), joined 2006.

Portland State University (Portland, Ore.),
joined 1996.

Sacramento State (Sacramento, Calif.), joined
1996

Weber State University (Ogden, Utah)

Football affiliate members

On Sept. 7, 2010, Cal Poly and UC Davis accepted invitations to join the Big Sky as football affiliate members.

Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo, Calif.)

UC Davis (Davis, Calif.).

Former Big Sky Conference Members

Gonzaga (1963-1979)

Boise State University (1970-1996)

Cal State Northridge (1996-2001)

University of Idaho (1963-1996)

University of Nevada (1979-1992)



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY

Location: Grand Forks, N.D.

Population: 51,216

University Founded: 1883

Enrollment: 14,194

President: Dr. Robert O. Kelley

Athletics Director: Brian Faison

Senior Woman Administrator: Daniella Irlle

Assistant AD/Media Relations: Jayson Hajdu

Nickname: Fighting Sioux (Will be retired in April, 2011)

Colors: Kelly Green & white.

School Web Site: www.und.edu

Athletic Web Site: www.fightingsioux.com

Sports: Baseball, Men's and Women's Basketball, Football, Men's & Women's Golf, Men's & Women's hockey, Women's Soccer, Women's Softball, Men's & Women's Swimming & Diving, Women's Tennis, Men's and Women's Cross Country/Track and Field, Volleyball

Football Stadium: Alerus Center (12,283). Opened in 2001.

Basketball Arena: Betty Engelstad Sioux Center (3,300). Opened in 2004.

Coaches of Big Sky Conference Sponsored Sports

Football – Chris Mussman

Men's Basketball – Brian Jones

Women's Basketball – Gene Roebuck

Women's Soccer – Kristen Gay

Women's Volleyball – Ashley Hardee

Women's Golf – Dan Frei

Men's Tennis – N/A

Women's Tennis - Tom Wynne

Cross Country/Track & Field – Dick Clay

Location: Cedar City, Utah

Population: 27,823

University Founded: 1897

Name History: Branch Normal School (1887-1913), Branch Agricultural College (1913-1953), College of Southern Utah (1953-1969), Southern Utah State College (1969-1990), Southern Utah University (1991-present)

Enrollment: 8,066

President: Dr. Michael T. Benson.

Athletics Director: Ken Beazer

Senior Woman Administrator: Kristen Whittaker

Assistant Athletic Director/Media Relations: Neil Gardner

Nickname: Thunderbirds

Colors: Red & White

School Web Site: www.suu.edu

Athletic Web Site: www.suutbirds.com

Sports: Baseball, Men's & Women's Basketball, Men's and Women's Cross Country, Football, Men's & Women's Golf, Gymnastics, Soccer, Softball, Women's Tennis, Men's and Women's Track and Field, Volleyball.

Football Stadium: Eccles Coliseum (8,500). Opened in 1967.

Basketball Arena: The Centrum (5,300). Opened in 1985.

Coaches of Big Sky Conference Sponsored Sports

Football – Ed Lamb

Men's Basketball – Roger Reid

Women's Basketball - JR Payne

Women's Soccer – Brian Stock

Women's Volleyball – Debby Baker

Women's Golf – Richard Church

Men's Tennis – N/A

Women's Tennis - Lenny Lee

Cross Country/Track & Field – Eric Houle

