

## UT, ESPN reach network deal

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AUSTIN (AP) — The University of Texas, which already has one of the wealthiest athletic programs in the country, is lining up for even more money.

Texas and ESPN announced a 20-year, \$300 million deal Wednesday for a 24-hour television network that will broadcast Longhorns sports, including at least one football game and eight basketball games per season, and other sports and academic content.

"We want to define what it means to be 'the' public university," Texas President William Powers said. "The challenge is to create new sources of revenue to support our mission."

The deal includes Texas' licensing and marketing partner IMG College, with more than 80 percent of revenue set to go to the university. It will not replace existing television deals between the Big 12 and both ESPN-ABC and Fox.

ESPN will handle distribution of the still unnamed network via cable or satellite in Texas and other states, and already has had preliminary conversations with Time Warner Cable and Comcast Corp.

The network is scheduled to launch in September and will broadcast at least 200 Texas sporting events per year. Football will include at least one live broadcast and multiple replays from other networks, the annual spring football scrimmage and pregame and postgame coverage.

"We're going to cover (Texas) football like it's never been covered before," said Burke Magnus, senior vice president of college sports programming for ESPN, the sports media giant based in Bristol, Conn.

Basketball will include a minimum of eight live games and replays of games broadcast on other networks. Women's basketball, baseball, volleyball, soccer and other sports, coaches shows, biographies and highlights also would be broadcast.

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Programming will also include some academic and cultural shows. The contract will send least \$25 million to academics over the next five years, Powers said. The network will build studio space at Royal-Memorial Stadium and will employ up to 100 people.

George Bodenheimer, president of ESPN Inc. and ABC Sports, called the network "a testament to the school's remarkable, tradition-rich success and widespread, devoted fan base."

The ability to launch its own network was a major reason why Texas rejected offers to leave the Big 12 to join the Big Ten and the Pac-10 last summer. Those leagues would not have allowed Texas the independence to strike their own deal outside of the conference television contracts.

The size of the contract raises questions whether other schools in the Big 12 will be jealous of Texas' money and whether it could impact the next round of network negotiations between the conference and ESPN and Fox.

"I personally am not convinced that it's the best thing for their conference," said Steve Solomon, a former ABC and NHL executive who now works as a media consultant. "They can't forget that without those other teams, they could not exist. Give them credit that they have that kind of market power."

The contact also raises the question of whether Texas would consider going independent if the network proves successful. The Big 12 will drop to 10 members in July when it loses Colorado (Pac 12) and Nebraska (Big Ten).

Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds said Texas is not going independent.

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"Absolutely no. There's no thought of moving, no thought of being and independent," Dodds said. "We love our conference."

Powers said league officials knew Texas was pursuing a network deal even conference realignment threatened to pull apart the Big 12 last summer. Texas started researching a network deal in 2007.

Longhorns football coach Mack Brown was excited about the "unbelievable exposure" for Texas sports.

"It will allow fans of college athletics across the country to have access to our sporting events and stories on this campus 24 hours a day. That's something everyone here can be really proud of," Brown said.