

UT talks to rivals about Longhorn Network

Written by Administrator
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AUSTIN (AP) — Texas officials talked with Big 12 athletic directors and presidents this week about the upcoming launch of the Longhorn Network in hopes of calming fears that it gives the Longhorns an unfair advantage over their rivals.

Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Longhorns officials are aware of the concerns among Texas rivals that the 20-year, \$300 million network deal struck with ESPN gives them a recruiting advantage and too much power over the rest of the league.

Dodds said he considered the conversations constructive and suggested the network would not put more pressure on a league that nearly broke apart last summer.

"I think the conference is in great shape," Dodds said.

But the network has raised questions around the Big 12 over the idea of moving one of Texas' conference games onto the subscription-based network and whether an idea to broadcast high school games will give the Longhorns an edge in college football's intense recruiting battles.

Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe, who also was involved in the talks, was quoted in the Dallas Morning News as saying that telecasts of high school football games on the Longhorn Network are now on hold, pending decisions by the NCAA and the Big 12 about how to handle single-school and conference networks.

The Big 12 also delayed the possibility of a conference game on the Longhorn Network.

"It's not going to happen until and unless the conference can make it happen with benefit to all and detriment to none," Beebe said.

Texas A&M regents were expected to discuss the network in a closed-door meeting on Thursday.

The Longhorn Network is a pioneering project and the NCAA doesn't have rules covering how it would select and broadcast high school games that could include Texas recruits Dodds said.

Texas officials have asked the NCAA for guidelines, he said.

"We're in a bold new world," Dodds said. "And we're walking through it."

Dave Brown, the ESPN vice president of programming who is overseeing the network, raised eyebrows last month in an interview with an Austin radio stations by suggesting the network would target games involving players recruited by Texas and other Big 12 schools.

If the network does broadcast high school games, Dodds said Texas will insist that it not be involved in selecting games and that all references the Longhorns and their famous logo be removed.

"We do not want to use it as a recruiting advantage. We don't want it tied to Texas," Dodds said. "ESPN knows we don't want to violate any NCAA rules and they don't want to."

Dodds said he realizes some Big 12 rivals might be upset if their game against Texas was put on the network and their fans were asked to buy it. Dodds has proposed letting the Big 12 have a say in which game be moved to the network and allowing that school to keep its regular allotment of games on ESPN or Fox, the league's network partners.

Dodds also said Texas would pay those schools to have the game on the network, but did not say how much.

Bringing the conference into the scheduling would put a more neutral party into the decision-making.

"The conference will be a part of how we do these things," Dodds said.

ESPN has not announced a cable or satellite carrier for the network, which is scheduled to launch Aug. 26.

"We want to play by the rules," Dodds said. "We want everything to be in the open with

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integrity."
