Written by Pat Clifton Tuesday, 10 May 2011 11:56

The conference realignment fun, if that's what you want to call it, which no one seems to want to do, is just beginning. The DI season will be over Saturday evening, and the College Premier Division's first season will be in the books a week later. As soon as the season's over, the moving and shaking, which is already well underway, will come to a head. This opinion-laced column is a mixture of what's already happened, what should be expected and my take on the issues at hand.

(Also included is a 2011/2012 conference map. If you want to skip straight to the map, scroll to the end.)

Let's start with the College Premier Division.

I want to get the compliments out of the way up front. The CPD has been a blast to cover, it's created some really high-level games and it's been the show horse for college rugby that it was supposed to be. Great players met on the pitch every week, and some programs rose to the occasion (Notre Dame and Rutgers), showing that if you raise the expectations, teams will meet the challenge.

Now, what were the issues? The most obvious was the financial burden it put on teams. The travel costs, as expected, were tremendous, and as one CPD coach put it, "it broke some teams." There will be teams, multiple teams, leaving the CPD after its maiden voyage, and all the ones we've talked to cited finances as the key reason.

Others will likely leave if the playoff structure is not changed. If an East team advanced to the finals, it would have had to travel west of the Mississippi in consecutive weeks to do so, and for some programs, that would have been a deal breaker. One CPD coach all but guaranteed an exodus of East teams if this is not rectified for next season.

Another aspect of finances that has been an issue for some: a lack of sponsorship. One CPD coach said USA Rugby painted an unrealistic picture of potential sponsorships, which would have helped keep costs lower if accurate, saying the one sponsorship they did receive, "amounted to about a handful of free balls...that's it."

The College Premier Division will hold a meeting in Salt Lake City the weekend of the final and the High School National Championships, where what to do about exiting teams, how to deal with teams that want in, and several other issues are expected to be on the table. We should know more after that meeting.

DI

Some new conferences have formed, like the Southwest Collegiate Rugby Conference (SWCRC), Independence Conference, East Coast Rugby Conference and Southeastern Collegiate Rugby (SEC). These new conferences show the initiative and administrative capabilities some critics of the restructuring plan thought college rugby, as a whole, lacked.

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That's a good thing, though there are still more conferences that need forming and nearly all of DII that needs to come together.

The real story, in this author's personal opinion, is how these conference are being created. One real worry I had when the plan was announced was the potential gamesmanship that could arise by giving the individual colleges unbridled power. I worried that programs would be squeezed out for selfish or political reasons. That, depending on who you ask, is starting to come to fruition.

The SWCRC was created to somewhat mirror the old Southwest Conference, a football conference that had some amazing gridiron tradition. Sammy Baugh, Eric Dickerson and Mike Singletary played in that conference. Texas and Arkansas had a now forgotten about rivalry that was once one of college football's best. So, in my own nostalgic way (which is weird, because I was 10 years old when the conference dissolved) I am glad some form of the Southwest is being put back together.

However, the SWCRC does not include Texas Tech, which was part of the gridiron Southwest. Texas Tech did not formally apply to be a member of the SWCRC before the conference was officially approved by USA Rugby.

But the SWCRC, which includes four teams who shared a conference with Tech in 2010/2011 and six who shared a conference with the Red Raiders in 2009/2010, did not go out of its way to include Tech. SWCRC commissioner Clayton Jewett (Baylor) said in the winter Tech and Texas would not be invited. Texas has since applied to be a member and been let in, but is not considered a charter member and is not allowed a vote. Tech, currently, is still on the outs.

Why no effort to let Tech in? Travel. Lubbock is a haul from every other college town in the competition, ranging from about five to nine hours. But the fact that every school in the SWCRC, save Houston, played Tech at least once in the last two seasons, makes this a weak reason to exclude a team from competition. Logistically, the most a team would have to travel to Tech would be once every two years.

If not let into the SWCRC, Tech's options become bleak. One is to go back down to DII next season, the last season they'll be allowed to advance to the postseason in DII without a waiver from USA Rugby. Part of the reason for this whole restructure was preventing traditional DI schools like Tech from competing in DII. So, no perceived problem is solved by having Tech, who despite going winless in DI play this season was extremely competitive, go to DII.

The other option is joining another conference. Well, while there are some schools not that terribly far from Tech (Oklahoma State, Arkansas, New Mexico, New Mexico State) there are not enough to form a conference that meets USA Rugby's minimum of seven. Especially if you consider the fact that Oklahoma State and Arkansas look to be members of the West-Central, which only needs to add one team. Tech doesn't make much sense in the West-Central, since the Red Raiders' commute to towns in Missouri and Kansas make the long trip across Texas look short.

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Tech's coach, despite me giving him ample opportunity to, has declined to say anything negative about the SWCRC, its leadership or its decision to not include the Red Raiders. Allow me: the decision to not openly and actively bring Tech into the fold is a selfish one, at best. As stated earlier, I like the idea of the SWCRC. I like Jewett. I have good relationships with multiple coaches in the SWCRC. But not inviting Tech is not a move that encompasses the spirit of the game. It's not being a good teammate.

The SWCRC is not the only conference who has excluded a team or two that makes geographical sense. The SEC opted to not include Arkansas State and Florida State, amongst others, because they wanted to stick with the traditional SEC schools.

Both, especially Florida State, fit the geographical map of the SEC. Florida State's coaches also refuse to say anything negative about the SEC's decision, for the record.

What are the 'Noles options? Either the ACRL, which would mean travel costs of CPD proportions, or the Independence, which will include some not-so-competitive programs and a pair of developmental sides. If given the opportunity, the traditional SEC would possibly leap at the chance to add the Seminoles, but since they haven't, the rugby conference says no?

The ACRL turned away a team that wasn't a traditional ACC member when it formed last year. I expect it to do the same this year when ECU, who should move up to DI per the restructure, inquires. Like Tech, ECU has no obvious alternative. (Article originally incorrectly said there were multiple teams turned away by ACRL.)

Would adding ECU to the ACRL or FSU to the SEC significantly cheapen the "brand power" or competitive sanctity of either league? Absolutely not. In fact, both ECU and FSU would instantly make both conferences more legit in terms of competitiveness. Again, these exclusions do not go along with the spirit of the game. But they do go along with the restructure laid out by USA Rugby, so the Boulder office needs to absorb some blame here.

These sorts of scenarios were easy to predict, and USA Rugby should have taken measures to prevent or deal with them. Texas Tech and ECU are solid programs with recent histories of success and doing things the right way. Does the potential good of this plan overshadow or justify potentially crippling programs like Tech and ECU or hamstringing their ability to ascend to their potential? I say no.

DII

This will be brief. Some people complain about FBS teams making playoff runs in DII, because those schools have "unfair advantages" or it "looks weird". As a proud alum of a school eliminated from postseason contention by Arkansas, an FBS school, that's silly. No FBS schools reached the DII Final Four this year. Two made the quarterfinal. Four made the Round of 16. Doesn't seem like a pressing issue.

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Conference Map

Below is the DI conference map I've compiled. Of course, this map does not account for CPD teams that are looking to descend back to DI or account for non-FBS DII teams that are looking to come up. This is going to be a living document that you will see again as we hear more rumors, new conferences form, old ones change, etc.

Gray headers: Either 2010-2011 Conferences we haven't heard are dissolving, or '11-'12 conferences we've confirmed. If a team is included that no longer should be, comment. **Black headers**: LAUs or leagues containing FBS rugby programs. There may be more we failed to identify.

Orange: Teams we've heard are entering that conference, but that we have not confirmed.

Blue: Teams who've been extended an invite to that conference.

Pink: Social team we do not expect to be interested in DI play.

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NCRC	ACRL	East Coast RC	SEC	NORCAL	SOCAL	West Central	E
Oregon State	North Carolina	Middlebury	Florida	Stanford	Loyola Marymount	Kansas State	M
Oregon	Maryland	Boston College	Mississippi State	Chico State	San Diego	Kansas	S
Washington	Clemson	UConn	Ole Miss	Santa Clara	UC Irvine	Missouri	Te
Washington State	NC State	UMass	Kentucky	Sacramento State	UC Santa Barbara	Truman State	W
E. Washington	Georgia Tech	Northeastern	Tennessee		USC	Oklahoma State	S
W. Washington	Virginia	So. Connecticut	Georgia		1000000	Arkansas	
Idaho	Virginia Tech	Albany	Vanderbilt				
Simon Fraser	Wake Forest		Alabama				
UBC		4	Auburn				
C. Washington			South Carolina				
			LSU				
Southwest CRC	Independence RC	Ivy League	Midwest West	NY State	Midwest East	Metro NY	100
Rice	Life	Harvard	Iowa State	Buffalo	Bowling Green	Fordham	1
Baylor	Mid. Tenn. State	Yale	Minnesota	Syracuse	Davenport	Kings Point	
TCU	Kennessaw State	Columbia	Northern Iowa	Binghamton	Indiana	Stony Brook	
North Texas	Goergia Southern	Brown	UW-Stout	Brockport	Miami		
Texas	Ark. State	Penn	Wisconsin	St. Bonaventure	Purdue		
Texas State	USF	Princeton	Nebraska	Buffalo State	Ohio State		
Houston	UCF	Cornell	lowa		Michigan State		
Sam Houston	FIU	Dartmouth			- R		
	FAU	Deep South	Michigan	NorCal	Ohio	PNRFU	
	Miami	Tulane	Michigan	Fresno State	Louisville	Boise State	
	N. Florida	La. Lafayette	Michigan State	Nevada	Cincinnati	Mid-South	
	Florida State	Troy	W. Michigan	San Jose State	Kent State	Western KY	
		Tulane	Central Michigan	1	Marshall		
			1 111 111		Ohio		
					Ball State		
		North Carolina	Allegheny	CARFU	Rio Grande		
		ECU	Pitt	Northwestern	New Mexico		
		Duke	West Virginia	Northern Illinois	New Mexico State		
		Texas	Illinois	Utah	Heart of America		
		Texas Tech	Illinois	Utah State	Tulsa		