

March 13, 2015



An Interview with:

**COMMISSIONER
LARRY SCOTT**

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Commissioner Scott will give a brief opening statement and then we'll open it up for questions.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Thank you. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for being here for the third Pac-12 men's basketball tournament here in Las Vegas. And I'm told I should also welcome those that are watching via the stream on pac12.com.

It's been a great few years here in Las Vegas, now that we are concluding our third year. It's a good opportunity to reflect on the event.

We knew we had a tremendous opportunity when we moved from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, based on conversations with our fans that this event could be a real fan favorite and that we would have fans in support of our schools from around the conference footprint, but also nationally come to see this event and help us elevate it.

But I think it's fair to say that the event has exceeded any of our expectations since that time, with really most sessions since we've been here sold out. And this year every session was sold out.

There's been great momentum that's been built. Every year has been better than the last, and we feel like we're on a great trajectory.

The feedback we get from our schools, from our coaches, from the student-athletes, and from the fans has been terrific. And I want to thank our partners here in Las Vegas, MGM, LVE [Las Vegas Entertainment], for all that they've done to host our teams and make it a terrific experience.

It gives me pleasure to announce, based on the success that we've had, that we've reached an agreement in principle with the MGM Grand to be back next year on a one-year extension basis.

And the reason for one year is we're delighted with the success that we've had and have every intention of continuing long into the future, but we're excited by the development of the new arena that MGM and AEG are part of. And over the next year, as we get ready for another tremendously successful, I'm sure, 2016 event here at the MGM Grand Garden Arena it will give us a chance to evaluate the new arena and consider it as a potential option to what we've built here.

Really pleased with the development of the conference in basketball. We've gone through a big transition. However, over the last couple of years, with five new coaches in the league, I think the future is very bright for Pac-12 basketball still this season in terms of teams coming out of this conference tournament with momentum, and hopefully doing well in the NCAA Tournament and very excited about what the future holds for our men's basketball program.

Last year, when I was here, we announced an exciting development beyond March Madness, talking about what we're going to be doing around the world in terms of our globalization initiative and taking a Pac-12 All-Star team over to China. We're really excited this year, we're taking that to the next level, and playing the first-ever regular season basketball game in China. November 14th in Shanghai, University of Washington will be playing against the University of Texas. It will be televised back here in the U.S. on ESPN and televised in China and that also represents an exciting development.

We've got now a season-long coverage of Pac-12 men's basketball on Look TV in China, that's something we announced a few weeks ago and our relationships over there continue to develop. We have 28 athletic administrators from the leading universities in China that were here at a symposium I spoke at this morning.

So the impact of Pac-12 basketball



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continues to increase, not just within this country, but around the world. And a lot of that has got to do with our partners, ESPN, Fox, and the Pac-12 networks that are providing an unprecedented level of exposure for Pac-12 basketball.

So the future looks bright. A lot to look forward to here in Las Vegas and beyond. I want to thank everyone here for your support and open it up for any questions.

Q. Larry, when is that arena expected to be finished? And how do you kind of envision that evaluation process going? Is it going to be a couple-year thing or how do you see that going?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: It won't be ready for the 2016 event, but our partners inform us that it could be ready as early as for the 2017 event. So we've got some time.

And between now and next year's tournament we plan to spend a lot of time going over the plans for the event and trying to understand the interrelation between the hotels and the new facility.

One of the great things about this event has been not just the experience within the Grand Garden Arena itself and the energy and the electricity and the atmosphere overall that's created for the fans and student-athletes in the arena and how it translates on television, all that's been wonderful. But a lot of the feedback I've received from fans also has to do with just the overall experience of being here and walking around the hotel and the buzz and how it's really permeated beyond the actual court and the seats in the arena itself.

So we're very mindful of that. The overall fan experience. And so there's a lot to understand in terms of how the new arena will work and the dynamics with the hotel and the overall fan experience.

Q. How long has this plan been in the works for Washington and Texas? This seems like a pretty big deal, regular season. Seems almost unprecedented, I guess.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: It is unprecedented in that the NBA, college, no one's played a regular season game in China before. Having said that, we have partnered with ESPN on an overseas event before. We had Oregon play an event in Korea at a military base in the past.

And we've noticed ESPN doing a lot around promoting some of these tip-off games. So given our China initiative, our focus there, we really wanted to be the first to do something like that in China and ESPN wanted to quickly partner with us in it.

So we're excited. We're excited. It will be a great experience for the student-athletes. Great opportunity for our school, in this case, Washington, and a great promotion and exposure. Great way to kick off the new season.

Q. How did the process go in choosing which Pac-12 team was going to participate in this?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: So we talked to all of our schools about their schedules. And this wasn't done -- maybe I didn't fully answer the prior question. It's not something that was planned years in advance.

It was really after the All-Star game. Sorry, the Pac-12 All-Star team tour last year where we were developing this idea and solidified the idea that we'd come back with a regular season game.

A lot of the schools lock in their schedules and non-conference games in advance. So we had informal conversations with our schools to see who had an opening on their calendar and who was eager to consider it.

And because it's the non-conference part of the season, it had to be a matchup against another school. We have a close relationship with University of Texas's AD Steve Patterson who coincidentally was at ASU when they went on a foreign tour to China a couple of years ago through the Pac-12.

So Steve had a firsthand experience on the value for ASU and playing over in China, the impact it had on the student-athletes, just as a life experience. And when he moved over to Texas, it was a very easy conversation.

When I told him what we had in mind, he raised his hand right away and said that would be great for Texas, we'd love to participate.

So this is the first of its kind. If it goes well, I expect it to have the potential to be an annual event, where every year there will be a Pac-12 China tip-off game that would feature a Pac-12 team against a non-conference opponent, big brand school from another conference.

So it's got the potential to be an annual event. But we're walking before we run. We want

to see how it goes.

Q. There was a report about a month ago that you were in favor of exploring freshmen ineligibility. Can you just update where that is right now, why you think that might be beneficial to college athletics?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Absolutely. And good chance to clarify: Absolutely supportive of exploring it and having the conversation. There is no specific proposal. There's no recommendation that I've made or that we as a conference have made. The rationale for it ties back to the letter that our CEOs put out last May. You may recall, our presidents and chancellors have been on the forefront of reform and wanting to see a meaningful reform agenda in intercollegiate athletics. So coming out of actually meetings we had at this tournament last year with our CEOs, there was a desire to really put forth a manifesto in terms and a roadmap in terms of the type of change we wanted to see in intercollegiate athletics and put forward the ten-point plan.

One of the points was given the concern about one-and-done, hopefully encourage the NBA and NBA Players Association to address raising the age limit, but if that's not successful, consider things we can do within the NCAA and working with the conferences to address some of our concerns about one-and-done, including looking at freshmen ineligibility.

I just paraphrased exactly what the letter said. It's the position of our presidents and chancellors to do what we can to address one-and-done, both with the NBA and then look at alternatives on a parallel track and freshmen ineligibility has always been held out there as one of the ways you might address it.

A lot of questions around it. Whether would it just be for men's basketball? Would it be beyond that? Would it be across the board? Could you earn the right to participate based on your academic performance? Questions of that nature. A lot of questions out there.

But I think at bottom, the reason our presidents are supportive of having the discussion is we feel it's imperative to really restore the importance of academics first, to put more emphasis back on the student before student-athlete.

And freshmen ineligibility would be a very dramatic way to make the statement that the expectation is that students be integrated in

school; they be going to class; they be staying eligible and have a chance to get their sea legs under them as students before they're kind of thrown into the competitive caldron of intercollegiate athletics and have to deal with those additional pressures as well. That's not to say there aren't a lot of freshmen that deal with it beautifully and handle it well and would be equipped to handle it.

But there are a lot of instances, particularly in football, where redshirting is already kind of an accepted practice with most freshmen. So it's not an uncomplicated topic, one that is starting to get some discussion. And we're encouraging the discussion. But we're nowhere close to being at the point of having a proposal or necessarily endorsing one as a conference. But we are encouraging discussion about it as one idea that could address one-and-done and restoring the academic primacy of the mission.

Q. On that topic, too, have you guys discussed at all the thought about how these guys that want to go one-and-done might just go overseas and the conference or college basketball in general doesn't get to see maybe the top talent anyway?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Right. That has been discussed. My position on that, and I think this is true for our conference generally, is we'd actually be in favor of liberalizing the NBA's current rules and letting kids go pro out of high school if they don't want to go to college.

So to be clear, if there are great prospects coming out of high school that don't really want to take advantage of the great opportunities they have for an education and to position themselves for better success in life outside of their sport, I for one don't think they should be forced to have to either go to college or go play in Europe or play in the D-League or do anything else for a year before they could go to the NBA.

That's not our rule, though. That's the NBA's rule. I think the point for people, at least in our conference, that have concerns about one-and-done, if they decide to go to school, that they really have a chance to get some value out of the experience beyond the athletic side; that they're really students first and having the opportunity to benefit from that and better position themselves for life.

Basketball is an outlier. In football, the

student-athletes are there for three years at a minimum. In baseball, they have the choice to not go to college but if they go to college they're going to be there for three years. And basketball is an outlier, in that you have a handful -- I don't want to overstate it. It's not the majority. It's a handful that aren't even staying in school for a year.

And there's a feeling that that -- it's an outlier and it really skews what the experience is for most student-athletes and should be.

Q. I guess it wouldn't be a Pac-12 press conference if someone didn't ask about DIRECTV. I'm just wondering if there's any progress. Seemed like there was a glimmer of hope when AT&T came into the picture. I heard maybe that's a bit of delay now. Could you update if there's anything?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Certainly. There's no new news or progress in terms of our discussions directly with DIRECTV. They've continued to show no interest in engaging in conversation.

And every time I get asked the question, I feel required to sympathize with our fans and share our disappointment and frustration that DIRECTV won't do it.

We're now up to 73 different distributors carrying the Pac-12 networks. Most of the major ones. And DIRECTV has been offered it on the same terms as all 73. So I don't have a good explanation for why they won't do it at this point.

The glimmer of hope that we've had is that the sale goes through to AT&T, and it's still in progress of being approved, that we could have fresh conversations with an entity that's already our partner. We have a partnership with AT&T on a couple of different levels.

They carry the Pac-12 networks on the AT&T U-verse service. And in addition they're the official telecommunications partner of the conference and our 12 schools individually. So we've got a very deep and multi-faceted relationship with them, very positive relationship. And I hold greater optimism that those conversations would go well with AT&T than they've gone with DIRECTV.

So the glimmer should not burn out of hope. But we are waiting to see if that deal gets regulatory approval.

Q. I know there was some recent reporting by the San Jose Mercury News about

some of the other conferences and their models with television networks. Does the Pac-12 remain committed to kind of having 100 percent ownership of its own network?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: We are in a very enviable position in terms of our television situation and our rights. What we were able to do in terms of our licensed rights with ESPN and Fox, compared to where the conference used to be, comparatively and otherwise, was tremendous. And I think exceeded everyone's expectations.

And the fact that we've been able to create and launch and have this early success with a network then that we own 100 percent of through our schools is really unprecedented, in a world where it's very difficult to be independent and others in the college space have had to take on a partner to even conceive of a network, to launch a network, to have some early success with the network.

We're always going to evaluate our position and the value of owning 100 percent of the network versus having partners. The beauty of where we are, in a very dynamic world that's ever changing through technology and distribution and the value, is we've got the ability to consider different models going forward if we want to.

What's pretty clear is that the value of college sports rights continues to increase. It certainly has increased since we struck our deals in 2011, since we created the network.

It's increased in value of sitting here in 2015. And I'm certainly bullish on the value of college sports continuing to increase over the next several years. So I think we are in a very unique and positive position in terms of being able to own and control something very valuable that's increasing in value.

But I think your question was are we wedded to -- we're delighted that we've been able to do what we've been able to do. But as the landscape changes, if it makes sense to take on different types of partners down the road, we've got the flexibility to do it.

Q. Speaking of television, are you guys -- do you have any flexibility as far as making game times and dates more fan friendly? I think there's been at least at Utah there's been a lot of angst I guess with late start times, mid-week games that start late or start early, and then also the

Wednesday/Sunday basketball schedule that takes kids out of school and things like that, any flexibility or talks on that about tightening that up a little bit?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: There always are. Scheduling is always one of the hardest things to balance. And one of the most sensitive things, because you're trying to balance what's good for television, what's good for fans, what's good for the student-athletes, all together.

Our scheduling became much more complicated when we made the decision that we wanted to get greater exposure for Pac-12 men's basketball and that we made a commitment to get every game on TV. We're a conference that five years ago it was pretty rigid in just playing Thursdays and Saturdays. One window on Thursday and a few windows on Saturday.

And that was easy to do, because we didn't have many games on TV. We only had a fraction of games on TV. Maybe only a quarter of our games were on TV. When we made a commitment. And so we have over 200 basketball games that are broadcast now.

And that required opening up more TV windows. So we went from playing every game at let's say 7:00 p.m. approximately on Thursday to needing to play, on average, every week is a little different, there are some exceptions, but needing to play two windows on Wednesday, two windows on Thursday and as well to open up Sunday, in addition to Saturday. You have to do that to make sure that every game is available nationally.

So that's required a lot of flexibility and adjustment on the one hand. And there's some tradeoff. You realize there's some pressure on fans and the fan experience and attendance. By the same token, there's been a tremendous, tremendous benefit for our programs in terms of the national exposure that they've been able to receive, especially -- and I don't want to understate this -- getting on to the ESPN platform.

Our basketball was not on ESPN five years ago. And ESPN has certain windows available given their other commitments. So we had to be a little flexible to make sure we're back on ESPN.

So that's the -- and I specifically speak about Wednesdays and Sundays. You see a lot of our ESPN basketball on Wednesdays and Sundays because that happens to be windows they have available. So you've got that on the one hand. And do we have some flexibility? We try to

use our flexibility in our relationship with ESPN and Fox and the Pac-12 networks to make sure it's as fair as balanced as possible, but the idea that we're going to play at 6:00 and 8:00 on Wednesday and Thursday, there is not a lot of flexibility around, if we're going to keep getting the exposure we're getting.

The other issue, which is related and you raised is missed class time. When we designed the schedule, we did not contemplate that if a school plays away in a state on Wednesday, that they're staying in that state until Sunday.

We very much intended that schools would utilize the increased resources they have to charter to get back. And in fact that wasn't happening as much as we thought it should.

So after discussions with our board, we made it a point of emphasis with athletics departments and coaches that we wanted to see them get back to campus after a Wednesday game if they weren't going to play again until Sunday. We want to minimize the missed class time.

So we're going to evaluate that at the end of the season, see how many instances we had of programs and student-athletes actually being away Wednesday to Sunday and I'm hoping that it's happening rarely now. But if it's not, we're going to continue to address that.

Q. Regarding the television and the attendance figures, does the conference as a whole look at it as it's a necessary evil, that there will be attendance drop-off, or is it a concern that you're looking at to try to improve the attendance figures, because of the television deal?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I think it's probably both. I think everyone goes into it with their eyes wide open to say up through 2011, we had a very attendance-friendly approach, playing at 7:00 p.m. one night of the week.

So we knew that there would be some pressure on attendance by being flexible on the windows. So I think everyone went into it with their eyes wide open and knew there would be some pressure in that regard.

By the same token, we are very focused on how we can help our schools improve their attendance in terms of how they're marketing the games, the fan experience, when fans are there and they're coming, and of course a lot's got to do with the success of teams.

We're clearly seeing those teams that are doing best in the conference tend to be doing exceedingly well in terms of attendance. Those that are having down years, tend to struggle.

So some of it has got to do with the performance of the teams, but there's absolutely stuff that can be done to improve the experience and get people there, despite the challenges on some of the week night times.

Q. This is on a little different track, but I don't know where else I could ask this. With Arizona State taking its hockey program to NCAA Division I, are there plans for other Pac-12 schools to do the same thing, and if so how will the conference facilitate that?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: There are no plans that I'm aware of for any other schools to be adding hockey at this time. Although club hockey is pretty robust at some of the schools. The Arizona State decision was not a conference-led initiative, really.

I think the athletic director, Ray Anderson, described it well. It was somewhat opportunistic because of the popularity of hockey in Arizona and having a donor that really wanted to see it, that they were able to do it.

But it doesn't represent necessarily a strategic direction for the conference and I really have no visibility at the moment on whether other schools might be able to add it or not.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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