

October 16, 2013



Commissioner's Forum

ACC COMMISSIONER JOHN SWOFFORD

JOHN SWOFFORD: Great to be in Charlotte as we look ahead to our 61st season, and first as a 15-member league, and look forward with a great deal of anticipation.

As I've said before, the composition of the long-term membership of the ACC has never been stronger. Geographically, we are moving forward as a true Atlantic Coast Conference with membership spanning the entire Eastern seaboard and even into the Midwest with the addition of Notre Dame and soon Louisville.

Just within our footprint, the ACC will have the most television households and the highest population of any conference nationally. And it is also projected that by 2030, 55 percent of the U.S. population will lie within the northeast and southern states, prime ACC territory.

The combination of our marketplace opportunities, along with the population numbers both current and projected, give this league enormous potential in both the near and the distant future.

As it relates to an ACC channel, we continue to work through the process of strategically evaluating whether a channel makes sense for our league and for our television partner. The discussions with ESPN are ongoing, and our focus of making sure ACC content continues to be available any time, any place, and anywhere remains a priority.

Now, let's talk about ACC basketball and the season ahead.

This year we welcome coaches Mike Bray of Notre Dame, Jamie Dixon of Pitt and Jim Boeheim of Syracuse. Obviously none of them are strangers to college basketball success. And when you combine the accomplishments of all 15 league

coaches, the accolades are staggering. And more than any other collection of conference coaches.

Here are just a few: Over 5,600 career wins, combined winning percentage of 67 percent; seven national titles; 23 Final Four appearances, and 15 National Championship game appearances. This group also records a winning percentage of 65 percent in NCAA Tournament play, 66 Sweet 16 appearances, 33 regional final appearances; 11 have made at least one Sweet 16 appearance, and six have appeared in a regional final. When you look at the winningest programs in NCAA history, three of the top 5, four of the Top-10, and five of the Top-25, are now ACC members.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge that three of the five active Division I coaches in the Naismith Hall of Fame are at the helm of ACC programs, and Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, North Carolina's Roy Williams and Syracuse's Jim Boeheim.

As many of you and our coaches have indicated, this may be the strongest collection of basketball programs ever assembled in one conference. And that is exciting. As I have said, the competition within the league will be brutal, and obviously I mean that in a very positive sense.

I know that I'm looking forward to it and it should be a lot of fun for fans, players, and those of you that are covering ACC basketball alike.

From a television perspective, the 2013-14 schedule features all-time highs in the number of televised games and national appearances for our league. As has been the case in recent years, every ACC-controlled basketball game will be available to our fans nationwide on one platform or another.

Through our relationship with ESPN, we have the ability to maximize the platforms for every fan to see ACC basketball. From traditional television to progressive digital and mobile platforms like ESPN3 and WatchESPN, ACC content is truly available everywhere.



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In addition to ESPN, the ACC Network through Raycom continues to be broader than ever before, with a reach of over 68 million households and no geographic parameters on the distribution. The ACC Network is now in 16 of the top 20 major markets, including New York, L.A., Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, Phoenix, Minneapolis, Denver, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Kansas City and Salt Lake City.

The ACC app and ACC Vault continue to flourish, while the ACC Digital Network has made monumental strides since launching in October of 2011 and is currently the most successful conference digital network. In the last two years, the ACCDN has experienced exponential growth distributing programming and highlights to millions of digital consumers.

The ACC Digital Network distribution portfolio includes industry leaders in Yahoo!, USA Today Media Group, YouTube, Roku, MOGO TV, Synacor, Sony Bravia, and hundreds of blogs and local media web sites.

Following the regular season, the 2014 ACC basketball tournament will be televised nationally by ESPN, as well as on all of our syndicated ACC Network channels. And once again, this year, there will be no blackouts on either platform.

The upcoming regular season obviously will provide our fans with ACC basketball appointment viewing, as well. For a third year in a row, ten of ESPN's broadcasts will be aired exclusively on the ACC Sunday night basketball package, which is preceded by a half-hour ACC Sunday night pregame show. This year's ACC Sunday night package tips off on Sunday, January 5th, with the North Carolina at Wake Forest game.

In addition to Sunday nights, ACC basketball is making its debut as part of ESPN's Big Monday, which will feature weekly Monday night league games from January 13 to March 3 starting at 7:00 PM each Monday evening.

The ever-popular College Game Day will also make two stops on ACC campuses during its eight-week run. The first will be on Saturday, February 1, for the Duke at Syracuse game, and the second will take place on Saturday, March 8, when North Carolina and Duke play in Cameron on the final weekend of the season.

And last year, we watched the University of Miami under Jim Larrañaga win that program's first-ever ACC title. This March, all of our teams will again travel to Greensboro for the 61st annual

tournament. It will be the 25th time the event has been held at the Greensboro Coliseum, which has hosted the tournament more than any other venue.

Our tournament format will continue to feature all league members, and we'll begin with three games on Wednesday, followed by four on Thursday and Friday, two on Saturday, and the Championship Game on Sunday afternoon. The top four seeds will continue to receive byes into Friday's quarterfinal round.

Now, let me stop with that. I know there may be a number of issues that I did not address that you may have on your mind in terms of questions. So let's go to the question and answers.

But let me again tell you how much I appreciate your being here, being a part of the largest turnout that we've had for this event, and for the coverage that you give Atlantic Coast Conference basketball throughout the year.

Q. Since you were just talking about the ACC tournament, when you go to Greensboro this year and you do expand to three games and Wednesday like you talked about, and the new teams, how do you expect that's going to impact that tournament as far as interest, fan interest, people coming? What are you looking for this coming year?

JOHN SWOFFORD: Well, obviously this will be the first time that we've done that. And we've looked at some other conferences that have put on tournaments of this size and what they have learned from what they are doing and have done.

We are in the process of deciding exactly how Wednesday will be handled. And it may be, we haven't finalized that yet, and we will in the reasonably near future come out with how we are going to ticket that particular day and how we are going to address that particular day, because it is different than anything we've had before.

But with the depth of the tournament and the depth that we have with the 15 teams we have in this league right now, that will be some good basketball on Wednesday. But we've got to make some decisions as to how we ticket it and so forth, and we are in the process of addressing that now.

Karl Hicks is coordinating that, and we have actually put together a sub-committee of representatives from our schools to take a look at that in terms of the best way to go about that additional day of the tournament.

You know, hopefully it will just be more of a good thing.

Q. You mentioned earlier about how people are talking about this collection of teams as the best ever. After the way the national kind of agenda has gone the last couple years, the ACC is down; it's slipping. How gratifying is it to have people look at the ACC basketball in that way again?

JOHN SWOFFORD: Well, it's very gratifying. I mean, that's -- you know, our history has been a very proud one from a basketball standpoint, and I think over the years, this league has arguably year-in and year-out been as good as anybody on a consistent basis. The schools we have added most recently and going back a few years and with Louisville coming next year, they are coming from a great conference, as well, from a basketball standpoint.

So we are bringing some terrific programs with great history and tradition from an excellent conference and adding that to the great history and tradition and programs that are already a part of the Atlantic Coast Conference. I think that's what's brought us to this point of strength.

Q. How likely is it that the ACC men's basketball tournament will eventually move to New York City, and if it does, do you still envision a scenario where it rotates back to Greensboro?

JOHN SWOFFORD: I wouldn't want to handicap that, but I think you have to consider that with our footprint now, that New York City is a prominent part of our footprint. And while I don't know that any college particularly owns New York City, I think there's great interest there in college basketball.

I think there's great interest in and respect for the Atlantic Coast Conference and the basketball programs that are in our conference. It's the media capital of the world. It's a great college basketball city.

So there's certainly some logic to the tournament potentially being in the New York market at some point in time. Some of that, if we were to be in New York, is based on venue availability and timing of that venue availability.

The tournament really was built in the state of North Carolina in the early years and has enjoyed great success there every time that it's been played there, whether it's in Greensboro or whether it's in Charlotte or even in the days when it

was in Reynolds Coliseum in Raleigh when it started. So certainly our league, former older members and newer members have great respect for that, as well.

And I think the question you're asking really leads to this fact: With our footprint, and the quality of institutions and programs that we have, it just gives us opportunities in front of us that we haven't had in the past. And that includes potentially being in some markets with a tournament that we've never been in before.

Q. D.C. has long been considered ACC territory, and with Maryland leaving next year, what priority is that market going forward?

JOHN SWOFFORD: Well, it's still a priority. It's basically still in our footprint. It hasn't moved, and we are all around D.C. and Virginia and Virginia Tech closest by and Pitt not very far away.

It's the nation's capitol. Our schools obviously do a lot of business, if you will, in Washington, D.C., whether it's related to legislative issues on higher education, or whether it's related to fund-raising.

All that considered, we would still look at Washington, D.C. as a part of the ACC footprint, and an important part of it. A lot of alums from our schools live in D.C.

Q. With conference realignment at warp speed like it's been here recently and with ACC adding three teams, losing one, do you see that slowing down, or are you worried about more teams leaving?

JOHN SWOFFORD: I'm not worried about more teams leaving. I do see it slowing down. I think that our grant of rights from last spring was really good for the ACC; and I think it was really good for the national landscape because I think at least that at the level of the five power conferences, equity conferences, if you will, I think we are all settled, in my opinion.

But I do think we'll see a much calmer period at our level, anyway. And it's touched every level. I mean, there are domino effects, obviously. And it's been a very challenging time for all of us, really, in college athletics with the changes that have come.

And historically, it's happened before and I don't know, some point down the road, it will probably happen again. But I think we are in a

period now with the terms of our television contracts and so forth that would mean that there's going to be a time of stability here for a good while.

Q. Since the summer there's been buzz that there's going to be changes next year within the NCAA. What kind of changes are you hoping for and what are you expecting to happen next year?

JOHN SWOFFORD: Well, I think several things, starting with the things that affect the student athletes the most; and how are we going to define amateur dynamism, and in today's world, does that need to be adjusted in a sense.

And what personally I would hope comes with that is an upward adjustment in the scholarship itself. I think whatever we do needs to be education based. Personally I'm not for paying players, but I'm for enhancing fundamentally the concept of the athletic grant made that we have now.

I think there are also some things that we can do, without defining exactly what they are, but to enhance sort of the education, if you will, and the decision-making of the elite athletes that obviously have professional potential in front of them. And I think we need to take a step back and see if we are handcuffing them rules-wise too much. Should we be a little more liberal with an athlete's opportunity to evaluate where he or she is at this given point in time as it relates to professional career in sports.

But I think we also have to on the other hand -- that's still a relatively small percentage of athletes that come through our programs at the highest levels that are going to have a career playing their sport, and if they do, the length of that career is not terribly long. That brings us back to the educational side of all of this, and is the reason that I feel like whatever we do needs to have an education base to it.

Now, maybe that's a supplement, a stipend to the scholarship itself; maybe it's the full cost of attendance, which conceptually sounds really good, but practically has some issues with it because of the Pell Grant dollars and so forth.

I guess I'm somewhere in the middle on some of this, because I'm not for paying players. I think that is a disaster waiting to happen if you ever went down that road and I don't think we ever will go down that road. But I do feel like that there are ways that are tied to education that can enhance the scholarship itself, if we can find the right mix.

We've done -- we, our industry, if you will, we've done a really poor job I think of talking about the other funds that are available for needy student athletes that are not part of the scholarship, that are over and above the scholarship. We need to do a better job of that.

I still think that the opportunity to get a free education at the quality of schools -- just taking our league as an example, in our league, and play a sport that you love, is a pretty good deal.

But at the same time, we can't live with our heads stuck in the sand. And that's why I need to really look at that, try to find the sweet spot if you will that enhances the experience for the athletes and their cost of education without losing track of the fact that it's college athletics. And I'm a big believer the collegiate model, understanding that it's not perfect by any means. But this is an opportunity to do that.

Secondly, it's an opportunity to restructure the NCAA. And that is -- we better take advantage of that opportunity, or we're going to continue to have problems as we move down the road. And it's a challenge, because of the size of the organization, because of the diverse institutions that are part of the membership; the differences in School A and School B and what they want out of their athletic program.

But we've got to find a way to restructure, and I think we can. I'm confident that we can. And when -- you know, things are not good right now from that standpoint. And what that tells me is that's an opportunity. When things aren't good, it's an opportunity to step back and be honest with ourselves and really try to make some changes that are significant and meaningful, and I think we can do that. I think we can do it under what I would call the 'big tent.'

I don't know that we necessarily need to have another division to do that, but I do think that, you know, the equity conferences need a certain amount of autonomy in certain areas to deal with the issues that we deal with. And I'm confident we can get there over the next six to 12 months.

But I think that we need to -- our system now is really, it's complicated. It's massive. People have a hard time keeping up with what the legislative process is and where a piece of legislation is in that process.

We've taken, not by design, but unintended consequences of what we are doing now, has taken the best practitioners out of the

process in large measure and that's the athletic directors. They are the pros. They are the ones who deal with this every day, 24/7. They are the ones who understand the subtleties, and we need to get them back involved in the process while also keeping the presidents ultimately in charge.

I think that's entirely appropriate, and I think our presidents need to be dealing with the real concepts and global issues of college athletics without being pulled into the weeds, so to speak, with legislative issues that our athletic directors and other staff on campus should be dealing with.

I also think we need to -- not need to; we have to find a better way to handle enforcement. You know, obviously that's not working well on a lot of different fronts. And again, this is a window of opportunity to deal with that, as well.

So there are plenty of challenges there to make change, and I think we can do it without, you know, undermining some of the basic concepts, such as, we are here to talk basketball particularly, I don't think we need to change the revenue distribution from the NCAA in terms of the basketball tournament. I don't think we need to change the access to the basketball tournament. I don't think we need to change access to the Olympic sport championships.

And if you leave those pretty much alone and you don't really change the divisions as they exist right now, that means that there's schools that are in the current divisions, maintain not only the access to championships, the access to the revenue from the basketball tournament. They also maintain their branding and that's important to those schools particularly.

So I know, if we are under the big tent, if we can give the equity conferences more autonomy where we feel like we really need that autonomy and can address the structure itself and get the right people doing the right things, we can make a lot of progress. If we don't, then it becomes a whole different ballgame so to speak.

And there are those who think another division might -- maybe it comes to that, but I think it can be addressed probably within the divisions we have.

Q. I think for the first time since the conference's inception, Duke will not go play at Maryland, and I was curious how things have changed scheduling-wise with the three new schools on board and how something like that with Duke and neither North Carolina State nor

Maryland, how something like that would come about.

JOHN SWOFFORD: Through the regular scheduling process. There are different schools that don't go different places in any one year to play. That's not particularly unusual.

The great thing that we have in this league right now, when you look at the quality of programs, you can't have a bad home schedule in this league. I mean, you're going to have quality teams and quality brands coming in to wherever you are. And with the -- obviously one of the things you lose when you get bigger is some people don't play each other as much. So that's part of the growth.

Q. You mentioned stability of expansion and you seem happy at 15. Does that mean you are not going to actively seek a 16th member, and if so, are you worried that you can get left behind if other conferences don't share your view of expansion?

JOHN SWOFFORD: I can't speak for any other conferences. But in the conversations I have with my colleagues in the commissioner's room, I think everybody's pretty comfortable where they are and happy to be where we are at this point.

In terms of a 16th member, that just complicates our lives quite honestly. With Notre Dame's setup with our league, as our 15th member, they don't participate in football in the sense that the other schools do. They do participate in terms of five games per year against our teams, but that doesn't effect the divisional set up.

And if we went to a 16th member, that member would play football in all likelihood, and then you've got imbalanced divisions, which is not -- it's doable, but is not ideal.

So I think we are -- the conversations I've had with our presidents and our athletic directors, certainly indicate to me that we are very comfortable with the 15 that we are.

Q. Inaudible -- expand again.

JOHN SWOFFORD: No, I'm not worried that we'd get left behind. With our media rights agreements, no, I'm not. I think we are as solid as we can be for years to come.

Q. If I can ask a football/NCAA question. Do you know where the Miami

situation is right now, and does the league have a Plan B if something would come down that would affect their post-season situation?

JOHN SWOFFORD: Well, we always have a Plan B if something affects the post-season. I do not -- I do not know where that is. I'm as perplexed as anybody else why that has not been brought to conclusion at this point in time. And, you know, hopefully it will in the very near future, and I'm confident that it will in the very near future.

But, you know, from a practical standpoint, it needs to be. You know, the thing that happens with the longevity of something like that, whether it's Miami or somebody else, is the pure length of time that it takes to bring to conclusion, becomes problematic for the institution in itself. So hopefully that will be over with very soon.

Thank you.

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