

# 16-team Metro studied

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The Metro Conference, spurred by the Southeastern Conference's recent move toward expansion, has revised its plans to grow and add football and is considering expanding the league to as many as 16 schools.

Asked if his school had been contacted by the Metro concerning a four-team addition to the league, Syracuse athletic director Jake Crouthamel said the Metro's proposal was bigger than that.

"They have laid a scenario out in front of us which is considerably expanded from that in number of teams," Crouthamel said. "It's gotten specific, but it includes a lot of people, some of which may not be available and some of which may be key players."

Two Metro schools — Florida State and South Carolina — have been mentioned in connection with the SEC, and Florida State has agreed to be considered should the SEC decide to expand. Louisville also is key to the Metro's future because of its prestigious basketball program.

The other five schools — Virginia Tech, Cincinnati, Memphis State, Southern Mississippi and Tulane — find themselves waiting to see if the league's most attractive schools stay or go.

The SEC also has targeted Miami, Fla., considered a key school for Metro expansion/football.

So the Metro has broadened its options to include a proposed 16-team league that would add eight of the nine non-Metro teams canvassed for the Metro by Raycom Sports & Entertainment — West Virginia, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Miami, Boston College, Temple, Rutgers and East Carolina. Penn State, the other school in the study, recently was admitted to the Big Ten Conference.

"That's Raycom's recommendation, that we expand beyond those four," said Cincinnati president Joseph Steger, when asked about the Metro adding West Virginia, Syracuse, Pitt and Miami. "I think [the number] was 16, somewhere in there. . . . That's what [the Metro] would like to do."

Ken Haines, Raycom's executive vice president and the person spearheading the Metro expansion study, said Thursday that he has met with officials of each Metro school and all prospective Metro members included in the consultant's report during the last two weeks — either at the College Football Association meetings in Dallas two weeks ago or at the National Association of College Directors of Athletics convention that ended Wednesday in Marco Island, Fla.

Haines presented the Raycom proposal to the prospective Metro additions at the CFA meetings. At the Metro spring meetings May 23-26 in Destin, Fla., it was announced that Raycom had asked the Metro to postpone any immediate expansion decision to allow the sports marketing firm to compile additional information.

The SEC followed the Metro into the same Destin resort hotel and immediately announced its desire to pursue expansion. Haines said the Metro's original intent was to add either two or four schools, but the SEC's plans prompted the Metro to consider other options.

"The Metro made an offensive move, and then the SEC made a defensive move that turned into an offensive move," Haines said. "What we're doing now is reacting to what's happened after all of this [expansion and realignment talk by several leagues] started to break loose."

Haines said that when the Metro athletic directors and faculty representatives gathered last month in Destin, "I think we figured we were going to chart out a course. But there was a recognition of everything that was going on out there; and that game plan was postponed."

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Asked about the proposal for a 16-team Metro, Haines said, "In our original study, we did a large number of different scenarios. In being specific in talking to some of the [non-Metro] schools, we did not include as many [scenarios] as we initially compiled. Now, we've pretty much laid out all we have to everybody. . . . Now we've gotten data on a lot more scenarios than we'd been looking at before."

To date, Haines said, the Metro has not asked Raycom to develop any scenarios that do not include all of the league's current members.

Haines said Raycom continues to compile numbers on marketing and television impact and how any expansion moves by other conferences — and changes in TV network schedules — might affect the Metro. For example, he cited the cutback in NBC Sports' college basketball schedule for 1990-91 to five games. Louisville, for the first time in more than a decade, won't appear on NBC.

He said Raycom would be finished gathering information by the end of the month, and said he expected the Metro to meet soon to review the new data. Ralph McFillen, the Metro's commissioner, said he

wants to have representatives of all schools involved in the league's plans meet in the near future.

"We need to move in due haste, to proceed as quickly as possible to get the interested parties together to look at this thing," McFillen said.

Steger said he thinks the Metro's efforts to grow won't be wasted.

"I think it'll work and I think we'll expand," Steger said. "How many and who they are would be presumptuous to say."

Haines described the conflicting expansion and realignment scenarios as a "cat-and-mouse game" among the various leagues.

Crouthamel said Syracuse would be willing to talk with the Metro, but said there are many unanswered questions regarding the Metro's 16-team presentation.

"Is Miami going to be in it?" he said. "How about Florida State, South Carolina? Pitt could go to the Big Ten. Rutgers could go to the Big Ten. I don't know who's going to go where."

The uncertainty, Haines said, is widespread.

"There is a lot of pressure along with this and a lot of athletic directors are very nervous," Haines said. "The schools on the fence are scared they're going to be left out. The schools with the power are scared they're going to make the wrong choice."