



ACC expansion: Conference comes to its senses, adds Louisville

Published Wednesday, Nov 28, 2012 at 9:47 am EST
 Matt HayesSporting News

The latest turn in conference realignment came and went Wednesday morning, and this time, Louisville finally won the lottery to escape the Big East.

The only question: What took so long?



Football coach Charlie Strong may be more likely to stay with Louisville now that it will be in the ACC. (AP Photo)

When the ACC went looking 10 years ago, Louisville should have been on the list. When the ACC had to scramble last year because the SEC was expanding, Louisville should have been the choice.

Now, only after Maryland left for the Big Ten last week and the ACC is more vulnerable than ever, do we see the ACC doing what should have been done years ago.

By adding Louisville, the ACC gets a football program that's more stable—and has more potential for growth—than last year's expansion winners Syracuse and Pitt. By adding Louisville, the ACC gets a tradition-rich basketball program on par with Syracuse, better than Pitt and a perfect fit for the hoops-rabid league.

Louisville's facilities are immaculate, and the leadership with athletics director Tom Jurich is strong and proactive. The move gets the ACC further into the SEC footprint for recruiting and television purposes and allows the conference to extend the battle against Big Brother from Florida, Georgia and South Carolina north and west.

So what took so long? The bluebloods in the ACC, for the most part, were focused on expanding with academics as the top priority. That Louisville isn't part of the prestigious Association of American Universities didn't sit well with ACC presidents.

Then again, neither were Virginia Tech, Miami and Boston College in 2003, and neither was Syracuse last year. Amongst the most recent additions, only Pitt was an AAU member, and frankly, after the sordid academic fraud scandal at North Carolina, those ACC pretenses are long gone.

With Louisville, the ACC gets a program that, based on the big two sports of football and basketball—and that's what expansion is all about with television dollars—is in better shape than every other ACC school with the exception of Florida State. The move to the ACC also could help Louisville keep football coach Charlie Strong.

The Cardinals will play for the Big East championship Thursday night at Rutgers, and Strong will be one of the hottest candidates for big BCS job openings. But with the move to the ACC, and with Jurich's stated plan to pay what it takes to keep elite coaches, Strong just might stay and reap the rewards of what he has built.

A strong Louisville football program means a stronger ACC. And in these tenuous days of conference realignment, the ACC needs all the help it can get.