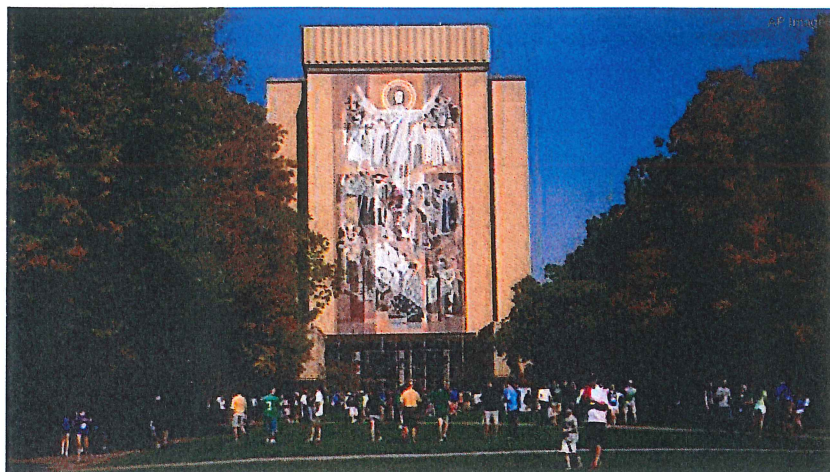




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ACC accepts Notre Dame as new member in all sports except football

The Associated Press

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CHAPEL HILL, N.C. -- Notre Dame got everything it wanted and the Atlantic Coast Conference got Notre Dame. The school announced Wednesday that it would join the ACC in all the conference's sports except football, though it will play five games annually against league programs and have access to its non-BCS bowl tie-ins.

It's unclear exactly when the Irish will leave the Big East for its non-football sports. "I don't think there's out there a better situation than the situation we have," said the Rev. John I. Jenkins, Notre Dame's president. "The ACC has allowed us to retain a tradition (of football independence) that's so central to our identity in football while we're joining a conference that athletically, as well as academically, fits Notre Dame perfectly."

The league, meanwhile, announced that it had increased its exit fees for member schools to three times the league's annual operation budget - which would currently come to more than \$50 million.

ACC Commissioner John Swofford said the exit fee goes into effect immediately and would apply to Notre Dame. Jenkins and athletic director Jack Swarbrick attended a news conference Wednesday at North Carolina's Kenan Stadium, where the Irish played the Tar Heels in 2008 in their first visit in more than three decades.

FUTURE ACC LANDSCAPE

Notre Dame will likely be here far more often in the coming years; the Irish will play each ACC member at least once every three seasons. The move will alleviate some of the challenges for a football independent of scheduling games and finding bowl openings with conference tie-ins gobbling up spots.

"Today is a great day for the University of Notre Dame and our athletics department, including the football program," Irish football coach Brian Kelly said in a statement. "Speaking strictly from a football standpoint, we have further solidified our future as an independent in college football, maintained our unique ability to schedule nationally and greatly improved our postseason bowl game options. ... [Jenkins and Swarbrick] have set our entire athletics department up for great success in the future."

For the ACC, the addition of Notre Dame was a show of stability amid constantly shifting league affiliations. The ACC - which will add Pittsburgh and Syracuse from the Big East next year - had informal discussions with Notre Dame over the years, as had other potential suitors for the school and its brand-name football program.

But the ACC made an exception to its all-or-nothing requirement for schools to be full members and equally share revenue to get a deal done. And Swarbrick said the ACC was the only conference Notre Dame entered into "substantive discussion" about joining. "I think it just came through in our internal discussions that now's the time," Swofford said. "This is a partnership that is a win-win and good for both parties. The time had come to cross that threshold."

Notre Dame will keep its broadcast partnership with NBC and won't receive TV revenue for other ACC football games covered by the league's recent 15-year deal with ESPN worth \$3.6 billion. Swofford said the ACC would re-negotiate its TV contract to account for Notre Dame's arrival. Swofford said the ACC is done with expansion for now.

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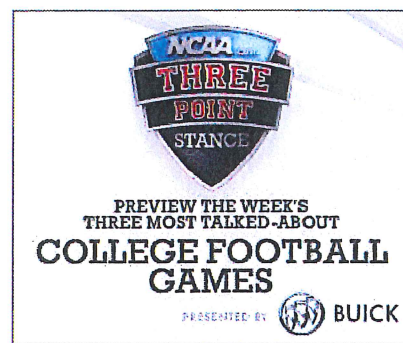
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"There is no need to add a 16th team to the league and there's no intention of doing so," he said. The Big East has a 27-month notification period for any member that wants to leave, and a \$5 million exit fee. Swofford said the timing of Notre Dame's exit would be handled by the school and the Big East. It won't come until the 2015-16 season, Swarbrick said, unless the two sides can agree to an earlier exit.

The Big East has shown a willingness to negotiate, as it did with Pittsburgh and Syracuse, who paid \$7.5 million each to get out early. Once Notre Dame joins, the ACC will have plucked six schools from the Big East - Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College joined in 2004 and 2005 - in its expansion to 15 schools.

"Notre Dame has been a valued member of the Big East Conference and we wish them success in the future," Big East Commissioner Mike Aresco said. "However, Notre Dame's departure does not change our plans. We have prestigious institutions that are excited to be a part of the Big East. We remain committed to making the Big East stronger than it has ever been."

Maryland football coach Randy Edsall said he was disappointed the Irish weren't joining in football, too, adding that he wanted to hear the particulars of how the scheduling rotation would work. "There's still so much information, but again for the overall good of the league, it is a quality institution and a quality program," he said. Notre Dame has played basketball in the Big East since the mid-1990s.

Now, in the ACC, the Irish will face traditional powers like Duke and North Carolina - and rekindle its rivalries with former Big East members. The league also fits other sports Notre Dame is competitive in, including lacrosse and soccer.

Swarbrick said he informed the Notre Dame coaches of the move Wednesday morning. One of them, men's basketball coach Mike Brey, attended the news conference. He spent eight years as an assistant to Duke Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski.

"I think it's great and it comes as a great shot in the arm, I think, for me and our program," Brey said. "I'm looking forward to it. I still know a couple of the barbecue places around here. I know where to find stuff."

The ACC in turn cements a relationship with one of the nation's most storied football programs, adding to a group that already includes Florida State, Miami, Virginia Tech and Clemson. That would also seem to position the ACC as the easy choice if Notre Dame ever decides to give up its football independence.

Notre Dame considered doing so in 1999 to join the Big Ten, but alumni were staunchly opposed and the deal never got done. Throughout the dizzying conference realignment of the past few years, Notre Dame officials have been adamant about maintaining football independence.

The ACC decided to accommodate Notre Dame's desires. Students at Notre Dame praised the move, saying it should help the other Fighting Irish teams.

"It's great. I think it's really exciting. They'll get to play a lot of new teams," said Mackenzie Dome, a first-year graduate student in global health from Ann Arbor, Mich.

"As long as we get to keep our football rivalry games, which it looks like we will, I don't think it will hugely effect our football schedule," said Alec MacDonell, an economics junior from Indianapolis. "There are obviously some decent teams in football and it should be a step up in other sports. So it will certainly good to see some better competition in basketball."

Even the Notre Dame football players endorsed the move. "It's great for our other sports. The basketball teams will get to play Duke, North Carolina, all those good teams every year. For us, we're already playing four ACC teams, add one more, it doesn't really make any difference to us," offensive tackle Zack Martin said.