Texas Holds 'Em

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Athletics: At a major university, it’s what pulls a lot of students away from the much cheaper community colleges. It’s why students spend more than $200 a year on tickets as an excuse to get drunk on Saturdays.

It’s also the reason for the Texas Longhorns’ new television channel. This yet-to-be-named sports giant will cover everything related to Texas athletics—from baseball games, to five-hour postgame reports, to coaches shows and even original Texas athletics programming.
An outstanding factor with this new deal is, of course, the money. Texas itself will bring in about $247,000,000 over the course of twenty years. That’s a lot of zeroes. This may make some Cyclone fans angry, but look at it from the perspective of someone closer to Texas’ money range. As Chris Williams, creator of Cyclonefanatic.com and Cyclone Radio Network host says, “If I’m an Oklahoma supporter, I’m a lot more upset about it than [if] I am an Iowa State [supporter]. The difference, financially, between Iowa State’s athletic department and Texas’ [athletic department is] massive as it is.”

I’m sure that if ESPN came to Iowa State with a twenty-year, $300 million television agreement (HA!) the athletic department would jump on it, and so would everyone else in Cyclone nation. In many ways, ESPN offering this deal to Texas saved Iowa State’s ass. Without the deal, the Longhorns might have left the Big 12, and who knows where we, as Cyclones, would be. Just remember, Cyclone fans, our athletic department will more than likely make a money jump of about $10 million per year when the new Big 12 television deal is all said and done.

All of the hype surrounding this Texas and ESPN deal was started during the conference realignments this past summer. Iowa State, along with other current Big 12 schools, want to know they can feel secure in their current situation. “As long as Texas is happy somewhere, you’re always going to have a conference. They’re the holy grail of athletic departments, and as long as ISU is associated with them, they will likely be in a BCS conference in some way, shape, or form,” Williams says.

Imagine you are a high school track athlete, and you are looking to go to a Big 12 school. Iowa State, Kansas, or Baylor come to you and offer you a scholarship, and you decide to think about those offers. Then, Texas recruiting staff walks through the door and offers you not only scholarships, but also the chance for every one of your meets to be televised nationally. Your sport would get exposure that it doesn’t usually receive, and hey, your entire extended family can watch you run the 800-meter dash. Sold!

Texas doesn’t need any help recruiting for football or men’s basketball. They already dominate those areas without any help from a new TV deal. Therefore, it will be the “not-nationally-popular” athletics teams in the Big 12 that will hurt from this new channel. Like I mentioned, recruits in other sports will be given an extra incentive in a conference that is among the top, nationally. On another note, think about the benefits to journalism students that this opportunity will bring. ESPN has said they will be staffing the new channel, but that they will integrate students from the University of Texas in every aspect of the station.

Texas was the determining factor on whether the Big 12 survived this past summer. When there were rumors of them leaving for the Pac 10 or SEC, let’s face it, ISU fans were shaking in their boots. We, as fans, felt that our team was worthy of a top-notch conference, but to the executives themselves, it’s all about the money. Keith Murphy, WHO sports anchor adds, “Iowa State has always had to do more with less, and that’s only getting more difficult. The alternative is to drop down to a lesser conference, but that’s saying goodbye to millions of dollars.”

As Big 12 members, we were also worried about Texas A&M or Oklahoma heading out for another conference. There is no doubt that these three schools are successful enough to head to whatever conference their hearts desire, but there is another factor at play, and that is politics. “If you look over history in the last thirty years, with any realignment that’s happened, Texas politicians are very instrumental at keeping those four universities together. So, I don’t think it will ever happen,” Williams points out. Williams says that a sports blog called “Frank the Tank’s Slant” got the political factors spot on. He also said that he heard from authorities “high-up” in the Cyclone athletic world that this guy “nailed it.” The blog notes that in 1994 when Texas and Texas A&M tried moving to the Big 8 by their lonesome, Texas politicians pressured those schools so that Baylor and Tech could join as well. That merge formed the current Big 12 (with Nebraska and Colorado still present, of course).

In 2010 the Pac 10 invited every Big 12 South school—aside from Baylor. This, again, didn’t sit well with the Texas politicians. As stated in a CBSSports.com article, Pac 10 Commissioner Larry Scott said the Texas politicians killed his plan. Murphy says, “I understand why politicians want all the schools in one conference, and it’s why I never thought Texas would leave the Big 12 for the Pac 10. Texas already has everything it wants and needs.”