

New League to be Called Great American Conference

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Six NCAA Division II universities from Arkansas and three from Oklahoma are forming a new athletic league - the Great American Conference.

The formal announcement of the name for the proposed new conference was made today by the chief executive officers of the nine member institutions -Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, East Central University in Ada, Okla., Harding University in Searcy, Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, and the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

According to a joint statement from the member institutions' presidents and chancellors, the name was chosen to "reflect the diversity of the league's geographic regions, from the Mississippi Delta of southeast Arkansas to the plains of western Oklahoma."

The six Arkansas schools are currently members of the Gulf South Conference while the Oklahoma schools hold membership in the Lone Star Conference.

Much of the impetus for the new league, according to the CEO's, is to bring together institutions with similar athletic and academic profiles as well as those in geographic proximity to lessen travel costs and missed class time for student-athletes. The new conference also recalls part of the athletic history of both states when the three Oklahoma schools were part of the now-defunct Oklahoma Intercollegiate Conference and the six Arkansas schools were part of the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference. Teams from the OIC and AIC were frequent opponents in all sports.

"This is the start of an exciting and promising era of athletic competition for our member institutions," said Dr. David Burks, president of Harding University and conference president. "It's a win for the institutions, for our athletic programs, our students, and our alumni."

Randy Beutler, president of Southwestern Oklahoma State University and vice president of the conference, called the new league a better fit for the institutions.

"The Great American Conference brings together like-minded universities with similar resources and places an emphasis on the student-athlete which will enhance intercollegiate athletics at our member institutions." Beutler said.

Will Prewitt, former associate commissioner of the West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, was recently named commissioner of the new conference. "This is an incredible opportunity to be involved with the building of the Great American Conference from the ground floor," said Prewitt. "When I look at the member institutions and their respective athletic histories, I think we have a chance to build a model NCAA Division II athletic conference."

The new conference plans to begin competition in the fall of 2011 after receiving approval from the NCAA. All schools are currently members of NCAA Division II and the new conference will remain in Division II.