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Ballard: Regional play is the goal
By Ronnie Woodward
Wednesday, February 15, 2012

Although Conference USA and the Mountain West Conference are set to form a league that is going to stretch from Greenville to Honolulu, East Carolina Chancellor Steve Ballard said Tuesday that the overall plan is to try and create regional play in all sports. The new league, which should begin play in 2013 and has yet to be named, is looking to add members — particularly schools in the east — so that regional boundaries can be set for a likely 18-to-24 team conference. Of the 16 schools currently scheduled for the merger, only East Carolina and Marshall are in the Eastern time zone.

Ballard said a membership committee is being formed and the league would prefer to add full-time members, but is also open to football-only participants. Hawaii, which will join the MWC later this year, is currently the only football-only school.

Representatives from C-USA, which recently lost Memphis, Central Florida, SMU and Houston to the Big East, and current and future members of the Mountain West Conference met in Dallas on Sunday and the planned merger was announced Monday.

“There’s a full commitment by all 16 presidents to have regional competition, so we’re not going to go to Hawaii unless they happen to be in
the championship game,” Ballard said. “It’s not going to be like the old Conference USA where we had teams going to El Paso (Texas) and then turning around and going back to Houston. That might happen for a year until all the members are identified, but all the members are committed to avoiding that because that’s not good for the student-athletes and we don’t think it’s good for revenue.”

The league could eventually include four divisions and not only a championship football game, but also semifinal games. It will also hold a conference basketball tournament.

Plenty of logistics still need to be worked out, including television contracts, and Ballard said the idea of semifinal games is appealing to prospective TV partners.

“There’s been multiple discussions with at least three television networks and there seems to be a lot of interest,” he said. “Almost everybody believes the net distributions to the universities will go up after we do this new deal, but I think the TV contract and the grant of rights that every university will have to make to the new contract are the most difficult aspects of this conference to work out.”

ECU has expressed interest in joining the Big East for months, but has not received an invitation to the league. Ballard said putting the Pirates into the best possible position has been the one constant for him during conference realignment, and the C-USA-MWC merger appears to be East Carolina’s best option for the moment.

“If any other options came — I actually think there’s some other options out there that we haven’t given up on — we’re going to pay attention to them,” Ballard said. “But I really don’t think that’s going to happen in the time frame that we’re going to be making these decisions on the new conference and I think it’s more likely that maybe later on something could happen. Then you always have to evaluate the cost of exiting a conference.”

Ballard said the new conference plans to have a universal exit fee, which should be finalized in the coming months. He said the goal of the university presidents is to have the league named and a final agreement signed by early May.

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East Carolina University spent Valentine’s Day playing the role of spurned lover after its public and relentless overtures toward the Big East Conference went unrequited. Instead, it touted the merits of a rebound relationship — that with a new conference forged from the remnants of Conference USA and the Mountain West Conference, to begin competition for the 2013-14 school year.

An alliance of schools stretching from the island of Oahu in Hawaii to Greenville — a distance of nearly 5,000 miles — the new conference intends to pull together those left at the margins of realignment. Yet without natural rivalries, geographic proximity or access to the lucrative Bowl Championship Series, the agreement is far from ideal for East Carolina and its future.

Last week, the University of Memphis became the latest object of the Big East’s affections as the conference invited the Tigers to replace West Virginia University when that school departs for the Big XII Conference for the 2013-14 school year. If approved, Memphis would join Central Florida, Houston and Southern Methodist University as defectors from Conference USA, leaving East Carolina is a difficult predicament.

It was a plight school officials recognized long ago. It was fear of being on the outside looking in that prompted Chancellor Steve Ballard and Athletic Director Terry Holland to formally petition the Big East for admission last year. And it was why state officials like Gov. Beverly Perdue were enlisted in the courtship effort. Yet, it is an overture that appears to have fallen flat.

The new conference may be a suitable home for Pirate sports — certainly many of the teams are comparable opponents — but it fails to meet the school’s long-term needs and expectations. Playing teams from California, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico may provide national exposure but does little to drive down travel costs for non-revenue sports. Fans will be hard pressed to attend away games, thus diminishing the cultivation of strong rivalries. And, most concerning, the new conference is not assured of an automatic bid to the BCS and the flood of revenue it brings to member institutions.
Ballard, Holland and all involved have done all they could to navigate the conference realignment scene to find a lasting union for East Carolina. Even as the university community can hope this new proposal will achieve that goal, it cannot help but feel like — once again — it has been left at the altar, longing for a suitor who never showed.
For the past two weeks, the East Carolina baseball team has been under Nick Schnabel’s guidance.

Schnabel is hoping that today, when head coach Billy Godwin returns to the team after serving a two-week suspension for an NCAA violation, Godwin will be satisfied with Schnabel’s results as the team’s top mentor.

Normally the Pirates’ recruiting coordinator and hitting and infield coach, Schnabel said the different role helped him appreciate what Godwin and other head baseball coaches do on a daily basis.

“I have a passion and a love for this place and I hope it went well,” Schnabel said after completing Tuesday’s practice. “I did my best every day, along with the coaching staff, and I feel good with where we’re at right now and excited about the season.”

ECU, which has been under Schnabel’s guidance for most of its preseason, begins the season with a three-game series against Wisconsin-Milwaukee this weekend at Clark-LeClair Stadium. Godwin, who was not allowed to recruit or coach during his time off, traveled to Florida and Schnabel said they talked on the phone a couple of times, but the conversations didn’t center around baseball.

A business-as-usual approach was taken during practices and scrimmages.
“We all knew that we were going to have to really come together and focus without our head coach here,” senior catcher Zach Wright said. “The seniors really did a good job of stepping up and kind of showing these young guys what’s supposed to be happening.”

As for Schnabel’s coaching style, Wright said he was more low-key than Godwin.

“Not as much in your face,” he said.

While Godwin returns from his suspension today, a couple of players will likely return to game action this weekend after a suspension that was handed out March 2010. Bryan Bass and Tyler Joyner, both juniors, were allowed to practice with the team last year but not play in games and lost a year of eligibility because of their suspensions as freshmen.

Bass, a middle infielder who is expected to compete with Mike Ussery and Timothy Younger for playing time, played in six games during his rookie campaign and batted .313 in the Southern Collegiate Baseball League last summer.

Joyner, a Northern Nash High School product who made one appearance as a freshman, is likely to be in the weekend pitching rotation.

“I’ve had two years to sit out and you don’t really know how much you miss baseball until something like that happens,” said Joyner, a hard-throwing left-hander. “Now is my time to get out there and pitch like I can pitch. Really the main thing is to not go out there and try to prove something to people because then I’m not going to pitch to my ability.”

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5 Triangle students taking research to U.N.

BY ALEX VAUGHN - avaughn@newsobserver.com

RALEIGH–Several Triangle college students have looked beyond the comforts of their own lives to delve into the hardships facing women in rural areas of North Carolina and the rest of the globe.

Anuja Acharya, a senior at N.C. State University, is one of five women who have received fellowships to present their research at an upcoming United Nations event.

They will offer previews of their presentations at a forum and dinner Thursday at the N.C. State University Club. The News & Observer is a sponsor of the program.

"This is exploring an issue we see right here in our own backyards and how it can be applied on a larger scale," she said. Acharya studied political participation of rural women for her fellowship.

Hannah Nemer, a sophomore at UNC Chapel Hill whose researched was on technology education for girls, said she was struck by the fact that each of the fellows were able to find local issues facing rural women that apply on a global scale.

WomenNC, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization, has sponsored fellowships for students to present at the Commission on the Status of Women at U.N. Headquarters in New York since 2010.

The theme of the CSW this year is the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication and development.

Each of the fellows chose an issue based on this theme that affects women in North Carolina and a local organization or program that addresses it. They will share their research at a panel at the CSW March 1.

Mariamawit Tadesse, a senior at Meredith College who researched agriculture and rural female farmers, said seeing women oppressed while growing up in Ethiopia made her passionate about human rights.

Many of the topics the fellows chose were challenging in part because research specific to rural women in North Carolina is not often conducted
and statistics were not readily available, said Sue Ellen Rosen, communications chairwoman of WomenNC.

Becca Bishopric, a recent graduate of NCSU, had to gather information from several organizations for her research on human and sex trafficking in rural North Carolina. As homeless people and runaway youth are among those vulnerable to these crimes, gathering data is difficult, she said.

Abby Bouchon, a junior at UNC Chapel Hill, said that being aware of what is happening with public health issues in North Carolina and how they are connected to what is happening nationally and globally helps to create a network that she can explore in future work. She researched rural women and community health systems, focusing on obesity and breast cancer.

North Carolina is the only state that presents organized research of local women's issues and programs at the CSW, according to WNC.

Anita Sivakumar, President of WNC and 2010 fellow, said their group is now recognized at the U.N. not only by representatives from other states but by those from countries such as Taiwan and India.

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Kiara Leslie of Holly Springs drives to the hole in a Dec. 2 game against Panther Creek. Leslie is averaging 17 points and 10.1 rebounds as a sophomore.

**Holly Springs' Kiara Leslie making name for herself**

BY DAVE MALENICK - Correspondent

HOLLY SPRINGS—Certain basketball players compete with a level of intensity that shows up prominently on their face, in their movements, and in their words.

Kiara Leslie is not that type of player.

But Leslie, 16, is a tough competitor. Much like her older brother C.J. Leslie used to do at Word of God, she is capable of taking over a game. But the Holly Springs point forward does it with an almost effortless grace, a soft-spoken presence and an easy-going smile and warmth that radiates to her teammates and coaches.

If there's a place where Kiara Leslie's aggression finally shows through, it's in the stats. There's not a category she doesn't affect.

During the regular season, the 6-foot sophomore averaged 17 points, 10.1 rebounds, 3.1 steals, 2.5 assists and 2.4 blocks per game.

"Her game has improved this year, especially with her being aggressive on the rebounding and shooting end," said coach Richard Young.
Recently against Fuquay-Varina, Leslie scored 24 points with 5-for-8 shooting and pulled down 12 rebounds. Her passing also was impressive, evidenced by six assists.

Coaches have teased Young, in his first year at the school, saying that it's unfair for him to have Leslie for two more seasons.

Holly Springs ended the regular season 17-6 and second place in the Tri-Nine 4A at 13-3. The Golden Hawks are poised to make a run in this year's state playoffs, which will begin next week.

But Leslie, who has scholarship offers from N.C. State, UNC Charlotte and East Carolina, knows her team will need her.

Last season she was injured late in the playoff opener, and although Holly Springs won that game, it was unable to get past Wakefield without her in the second round.

It's not uncommon for Leslie's famous brother to come to a game.

But even if C.J., a former McDonald's All-American who is a sophomore at N.C. State, isn't able to attend, he still gives his sister pointers.

The youngest of five children and the lone girl, Kiara learned the game from brothers C.J., Michael, Jamar, Kevin as well as her parents. She admitted that while her family always encouraged her, they never took it too easy on her.

Leslie said she only feels some extra attention being C.J.'s sister, and no pressure.

It's something she can't deny.

Much like her aggression, the genes shine through during the game.

Despite 22 points against Fuquay-Varina during a recent game, perhaps her best highlight was her stopping on a dime as she cut to the basket, then turning, leaping and snagging a pass that was almost a foot behind her.

Leslie smiled when recalling the play. But she didn't want to bring more attention to it. She instead voiced what really matters to her, what some players just show more outwardly.

"The most important things is the 'W,' " Leslie said. "We have a good team and just need to play hard."

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Banner Fundraising Year For Wealthy Colleges

by The Associated Press

For the 99 percent of colleges, it was a pretty good fundraising year. For the 1 percent of super-wealthy elite, it was a much better one that catapulted them even farther ahead of the pack.

The latest annual college fundraising figures out Wednesday show donations to colleges and universities rose 8.2 percent in fiscal 2011, crossing back over the $30 billion mark for just the second time ever, and improving many schools' financial footing after several lean years due to the economic downturn.

But the very richest universities accounted for nearly half the growth: Of the $30.3 billion collected by colleges and universities nationwide, $8.2 billion — or 27 percent — was raised by just the top 20 institutions. At those universities, fundraising was 15.3 percent higher than the year before, widening an already yawning wealth gap at the top of higher education.

Stanford University, which recently broke an all-time record by completing a 5-year, $6.2 billion fundraising campaign, led with $709.4 million collected in fiscal 2011, followed by Harvard ($639.2 million) and Yale ($580.3 million). Rounding out the list were private universities such as Columbia and Johns Hopkins, as well as elite public universities such as UCLA and the Universities of Texas, Wisconsin and North Carolina. Most campuses on the list have major medical schools and affiliated research centers, though No. 4 MIT ($534 million) is an exception.

In fact, the top 20 schools account for 2 percent of the 1,009 respondents to the annual Voluntary Support of Education survey by Council for Aid to Education. But they highlight a fundraising distribution that calls to mind last year's Occupy protests against U.S. income inequality. In fact, the fundraising distribution in higher education is more skewed than income: The top 25 percent of universities account for 86 percent of all private dollars raised for higher education, and the bottom quarter just 1 percent.

For colleges, the rich-get-richer trend feeds on itself in multiple ways. Already-wealthy universities can afford more staff to raise funds, and they
have a disproportionate share of wealthy alumni. But they're also able to attract the most promising researchers, which helps them win the competition for dollars from philanthropists who want their money to have the best chance of creating new knowledge.

"The institutions that raise the most, they raise the most because they have a case to make for needing that much support," said survey director Ann Kaplan.

The fundraising numbers come a few weeks after another report showed that college endowments — the investments universities hold to generate income in support of their mission — have also nearly recovered from a hit that began with 2008 stock market crash and forced many schools to make painful budget cuts. The average college endowment returned 19.2 percent in fiscal 2011, according to data from the National Association of College and University Business Officers and Commonfund. There were 73 institutions with endowments over $1 billion, led by Harvard with $31.7 billion — though that's still off its peak of about $37 billion at the end of 2008.

The billionaire schools account for $285 billion — or 70 percent — of the $408 billion in endowment money held by all colleges and universities.

The Top 20 institutions rely heavily on fundraising and endowments. At Stanford, for instance, endowment spending accounts for 20 percent of the university's $4.1 billion operating budget — more than it gets from students (18 percent). The 99 percent schools typically get much more of their revenue from tuition, with endowments more akin to an emergency financial cushion.

Last year's fundraising total nationally remains $1.3 billion below the 2008 peak of $31.6 billion, and while some non-elite schools had good years, many were still struggling as the economy sputtered last year. Roughly two-thirds outside the Top 20 saw fundraising rise by less than the 8.2 percent national average.

Even some well-known institutions have had a hard slog. The University of Virginia, for instance, which fell just outside the latest Top 20 for 2011, came up about $400 million short on a planned eight-year, $3 billion campaign had been scheduled to wrap up last year.

Another challenge: Colleges typically have little flexibility on how endowment dollars are spent, Kaplan noted. Completely unrestricted gifts amounted to just 7.9 percent of donations; the rest are given for specific
purposes, such as research, scholarships or endowed professorships. Roughly 14 percent was donated for buildings, property and equipment. Alumni giving rose 9.9 percent nationally, and accounted for about 26 percent of the donations colleges receive. Corporate donations rose 6.6 percent. Donations from foundations, which remain the largest source of support at about 29 percent, rose 3.3 percent.

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Chess Coach to Leave Texas Tech With Her Team’s Best in Tow

By DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN

Imagine if a university without a basketball program recruited Mike Krzyzewski, the legendary coach at Duke University, and not only managed to hire him but also persuaded most of his team to switch with him. In essence, that is what Webster University in St. Louis has done by hiring Susan Polgar, the head of the Texas Tech chess program.

Ms. Polgar, a grandmaster and a former women’s world champion, was hired by Texas Tech University in 2007 to create an elite chess program. The university even named the program after her, calling it the Susan Polgar Institute for Chess Excellence, or Spice.

Last April, Texas Tech won the Final Four of Chess, a competition in Herndon, Va., among the top collegiate teams in the country. It was Texas Tech’s first championship since Ms. Polgar arrived at the university.

Now Ms. Polgar and her husband, Paul Truong, the manager of the chess team, are leaving Texas Tech, which is spread over more than 1,800 acres in
Lubbock and has more than 32,000 students. They are heading to Webster, a university mostly geared toward postgraduate students around the world, whose main campus in St. Louis is 47 acres. The chess program at Webster will be called Spice.

The top 10 players at Texas Tech — eight grandmasters and two international masters, some of whom had just committed to the university — are also switching. They are scheduled to start in the fall; Ms. Polgar is to begin on June 1. On paper, Webster will have the No. 1 ranked team in the country.

In an interview with KCBD, NBC’s local affiliate in Lubbock, Mr. Truong said the switch was caused by a lack of financial resources at Texas Tech. Ms. Polgar told KCBD that the program grew too quickly for the university to accommodate it.

Chris Cook, a spokesman for Texas Tech, said that budget cuts had affected several teams but that they were still adequately financed. “We are giving the programs what they need to compete,” Mr. Cook said. He said the university intended to hire a new coach and a new manager to succeed Ms. Polgar and Mr. Truong.

Julian Z. Schuster, the provost of Webster University, said he was responsible for recruiting and hiring Ms. Polgar and establishing the team. Mr. Schuster said that he and Ms. Polgar had mutual friends and that he had learned she was thinking about leaving Texas Tech. They exchanged e-mails, and Ms. Polgar went to visit.

“Technically, I don’t know who winked first,” Mr. Schuster said. “You know the old expression: it takes two to tango.”

Mr. Schuster said Webster had an endowment of about $80 million and was financing the new program, including the cost of scholarships, entirely on its own. The financial commitment would run at least long enough for the students who are matriculating, some of whom are freshmen, to graduate. Mr. Schuster said that having a top team would eventually more than pay for itself by raising Webster’s profile and stimulating interest in the university.

Mentioning that Webster has campuses in more than 100 places around the world, Mr. Schuster, who grew up in the former Yugoslavia, where chess is popular, said: “I did not grow up in this country. I do not play football. I do not have this connection from the old country. Chess is a global game, and we live in global times. And Webster is a global university.”
Distinguishing itself from other universities was one of the primary reasons Texas Tech created its chess program five years ago. Other universities — including the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County — have made similar decisions.

James A. Stallings, the director of the Dallas chess program, said Webster’s recruitment of such a top team was “unprecedented,” pointing out that most programs start from scratch.

(Coincidentally, just three days before Webster made its announcement on Feb. 3, Lindenwood University, a liberal arts institution just outside of St. Louis that has 17,000 students, said it was starting a chess program and had hired a local grandmaster named Ben Finegold as its coach.)

Mr. Stallings said he was a little concerned from a fairness standpoint about Webster recruiting so many of Texas Tech’s players as well as its coaching staff, but he welcomed the creation of another top program.

“It validates the concept,” Mr. Stallings said. “It is a good thing for scholastic youth in this country.”

Mr. Schuster at Webster said simply, “To use the chess analogy, I think we made the right move.”
Universities are bringing Occupy into the classroom
By Natalie DiBlasio, Special for USA TODAY
Updated 1d 8h ago

The Occupy movement is starting to set up camp in university course catalogs, syllabuses and classrooms. There are new course offerings and a new focus in older ones.

Professor Jeff Edwards, who is teaching "Occupy Everywhere" at Roosevelt University in Chicago this semester, says a third of the political science majors there are enrolled in the course.

Roosevelt allows professors to teach a class one time before the official approval process as long as the department approves it, Edwards says. In his view, the Occupy movement, which started in September near New York City's Wall Street as a protest against economic inequality, is having enough of an impact on American culture to stand alone in its own course.

"This movement is playing out in front of us and I thought it would be negligent if I didn't create a space for our students to evaluate it," Edwards says.

Several other universities have also moved quickly to fashion Occupy courses this semester:

•Brown University visiting assistant professor Derek Seidman created a seminar: "The Occupy Movement in Historical Context" after an Occupy teach-in at the University in October attracted about 600 people.
• UC San Diego professor Ivan Evans' course "Social Movements" is zeroing in on the Occupy movement this semester. "Now we focus on the organization and structure of social movements because of Occupy's unique model," Evans says.

• New York University is offering "Cultures and Economies: Why Occupy Wall Street? The History and Politics of Debt and Finance" taught by professor Lisa Duggan.

Roosevelt student Anna Gurevich, 19, has gotten a "mixed bag" of reactions when she talks to people about taking the course.

"You get people who laugh it off and say, 'that's not a college course' or 'that's silly,' " Gurevich says. "Some people say it should just be part of another course on social movements, but a lot of people think it's a very good course offering."

"I just cannot support a university such as Roosevelt that teaches students on OWS," counters Roosevelt alumni and Occupy movement opponent David Lempke. "The youth should not study a group of individuals that seem to enjoy causing trouble more than spreading political beliefs."

An Occupy course was listed to be available this spring on the website of Columbia University in New York City, but it did not run because it hadn't gone through the approval process, says Vice President for Public Affairs Brian Connolly. Connolly says it had nothing to do with the content of the course and that a class of that nature is something that Columbia would consider for the future.