

ACC, Big Ten And Pac-12 Eyeing Partnership



According to a report from Nicole Auerbach of *The Athletic*, the ACC, Big Ten and Pac-12 are closely exploring an alliance among the three leagues as an answer to the forthcoming 16-team SEC and could be announcing plans within the next week.

“The Big Ten, Pac-12 and ACC are expected to make a formal announcement about their alignment soon, perhaps as early as next week, multiple sources told *The Athletic*,” the report states. “It’s not yet clear how specific the announcement will be because there are so many details to iron out, although administrators in all three leagues have stressed in recent conversations that issues of governance can and should be front and center.”

Schools within the three conferences believe they are like-minded, that they want to continue to prioritize broad-based sports offerings and that the academic profile of their institutions matters – as does graduating athletes. For example, Big Ten schools sponsor an average of 24.8 sports per campus, with the ACC (23.8) and Pac-12 (22.9) not far behind. SEC schools offer an average of 19.9 sports.”

There are not yet any hardened details on what the alliance could look like, but Auerbach opines that this is likely to be much more significant than just a TV rights play for football, indicating that the plan “goes far beyond the concepts of scheduling and television inventory.”

Concerns about the relationships between the SEC and ESPN, as well as ESPN and the College Football Playoff have reportedly played a significant role in this move as well, and the conference commissioners are hoping that an allied front could help to delay any potential playoff expansion, which really started to take off this offseason.

“One motivating factor for at least two of the conferences involved in these discussions is ESPN,” Auerbach writes. “If ESPN has exclusive rights to the 16-team SEC and also the expanded Playoff because it negotiates during its exclusive window pre-2026, the network essentially owns the sport. This is a cause for concern for some high-ranking administrators in the Big Ten and Pac-12.”

The Big Ten and Pac-12 have worked closely together for years, establishing the Rose Bowl partnership decades prior to this and frequently working to create non-conference matchups in all sports, including Ohio State’s week two battle with Oregon slated for Sept. 11.