

Gene Smith, Kristina Johnson Speak On UCLA, USC's Addition To Big Ten



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and president Kristina Johnson spoke Friday morning about the addition of UCLA and USC to the Big Ten, agreeing that expanding to include two of college football's most historic programs makes the conference stronger.

"We're just so excited about our future," Smith said. "It's phenomenal."

He confirmed that the schools submitted their formal applications for the Big Ten on Thursday morning, and the conference voted later in the evening to approve their inclusion beginning in 2024.

"Ohio State has been a program for the Big Ten over the years that has been at the top of the pyramid," Smith said. "Now we have two others who can contribute to that weight."

UCLA and USC leaving the Pac-12 for the Big Ten helps the conference further consolidate power in a developing arms race between mega-conferences and moves the conference to 16 teams, which matches the SEC following the upcoming addition of Oklahoma and Texas.

And while the move does better position the Big Ten in the national scene, Smith said that expansion was not about matching the efforts of other conferences.

"At the end of the day, we needed to look at what's best for our 14 schools," he said.

Though the move may be the best for the Big Ten, Johnson, when asked about the impact on the Pac-12 and whether that was taken into consideration when voting unanimously to add UCLA and USC, she said that she and Smith took into consideration how it would change the landscape of college sports.

"I think we understood how game-changing this is, so it wasn't taken lightly," Johnson said. "As presidents, we had a great discussion and at the end of the day, we think this is the best thing for our student-athletes and we think this is the best thing for our conference."

UCLA and USC joining the Big Ten is a bombshell in its own right, but Johnson said it's possible that expansion is not over, and more programs from the Pac-12 could be on the table.

"As our athletic director said, it's a little early to speculate," Johnson said of the Pac-12 potentially ending. "I would be surprised if this is the last move."