

Smith Weighs In On UCLA, USC's Impact On Next Big Ten Media Rights Deal



The addition of USC and UCLA into the Big Ten flipped the landscape of college athletics on its head from a competitive standpoint, but it will also carry plenty of weight on the Big Ten's ongoing pursuit of a new media rights deal.

The swift inclusion of USC and UCLA undoubtedly impacts the conference's standing in terms of a new media rights deal, likely for the better. The Big Ten's current media rights deal is slated to end in 2023, and with the conference in flux, a report in Sports Business Journal said negotiations on a new deal may spill into August or even as late as Labor Day. Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith categorized the addition of UCLA and USC as a major development for the Big Ten's TV rights deal.

"There will be an upside, there definitely will be a significant upside," Smith said. "It's major. You're picking up California and the contiguous areas, as [university president Kristina Johnson] shared, we have a large number of alums in that area. But, for the Big Ten conference and our schools, that is the largest area for the Big Ten conference. When you think about all of our schools going out there, it's going to be major."

USC and UCLA's introduction to the Big Ten now gives the conference universities in the three largest television markets in the country, New York (Rutgers), Los Angeles (USC and UCLA) and Chicago (Northwestern), according to Nielsen's Spring 2022 designated market area data. Smith emphasized that the addition of the Los Angeles market is a positive as the Big Ten searches for a new TV deal.

Although Smith could not quantify how much money the addition of USC and UCLA would produce for the conference, in terms of their media rights agreement, he placed confidence in Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren's ability to secure a strong media deal for the new-look Big Ten.

"It's hard at this point in time to project the total impact. All we know is now we're in the top three media markets in the country," Smith said. "Kevin, who has done a marvelous job with this process, will continue to have discussions with our media partners throughout this month. Hopefully, somewhere this fall, if not by the end of the month, we'll have something determined.

"It's hard to project an actual number or quantify it at this point in time," he continued. "We have a number of different media partners who are very interested in some type of relationship. We'll just have to see how that cascades over the next X number of weeks."