

Meeting No. 875

THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

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February 25, 1994

Austin, Texas

MEETING NO. 875

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1994.--The members of the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System convened at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, February 25, 1994, in the Regents' Meeting Room on the ninth floor of Ashbel Smith Hall in Austin, Texas, with the following in attendance:

ATTENDANCE.--

Present

Chairman Rapoport, presiding  
Vice-Chairman Temple  
Vice-Chairman Lebermann  
Regent Hicks  
Regent Loeffler  
Regent Ramirez  
Regent Smiley

Absent

\*Regent Cruikshank  
\*Regent Holmes

Executive Secretary Dilly

Chancellor Cunningham  
Executive Vice Chancellor Duncan

In accordance with a notice being duly posted with the Secretary of State and there being a quorum present, Chairman Rapoport called the emergency special meeting to order. Chairman Rapoport announced that the only matter to come before the Board this morning was the consideration of a revised conference alignment for the Men's and Women's Intercollegiate Athletics programs at The University of Texas at Austin.

U. T. Austin: Acceptance of Invitation from Big Eight Conference to Become a Member of that Athletic Conference and Authorization for the Chancellor and President of U. T. Austin to Negotiate and Finalize Terms and Conditions of Such Membership.--Chairman Rapoport called on Chancellor Cunningham to begin the review of the matter before the Board, and Chancellor Cunningham made the following statement:

Statement by Chancellor Cunningham

I open our session this morning with some comments which are designed to place the matter before us in perspective.

The immediate situation that we are addressing today began when the Southeastern Conference withdrew from the College Football Association television package.

\*Regents Cruikshank and Holmes were excused because of prior business commitments.

Two conferences, the Southwest Conference and the Big Eight Conference, collaborated on the development of a television contract. In a sense, it could be characterized as a "mini-CFA package."

This alternative was not viable because the television contract that was proposed by ABC and ESPN did not approach acceptability.

A number of alternatives were examined. These included:

- a. Number one -- do nothing.
- b. Number two -- go alone to another conference.
- c. Number three -- accept an invitation from the Big Eight to join it, along with three other Southwest Conference universities.

Before I ask President Berdahl to review the action that is being proposed today, I would like to remind the Board of Regents that The University of Texas has been concerned about the long-term viability of the Southwest Conference for many years.

Many of you will recall that on August 24, 1990, President William Mobley of Texas A&M University and I issued a joint press release that indicated that while the Southwest Conference has "a long and rich tradition of vigorous competition," it "cannot be a viable organization unless several changes are made."

These changes included:

- a. An improvement in fan support throughout the Conference.
- b. The development of a more competitive environment throughout the Conference for women's athletics.

I regret that since that press release was issued, average attendance at Southwest Conference football games has gone from 39,352 in 1991 to 35,553 in 1993. If one removes U. T. and A&M from the equation, the decrease in average attendance has been even more dramatic -- going from 30,400 to 26,698. The data is similar for basketball.

In addition, I am sorry to report to you today that the Southwest Conference had made only limited progress in strengthening women's athletics programs.

All of these conditions are regrettable. The history and tradition of the Southwest Conference is interwoven with the very fabric of our state and our lives. A change is both sad and painful. Nevertheless, in this case, change is inevitable.

I now introduce to you Dr. Robert Berdahl, President of The University of Texas at Austin, who will expand on these matters and offer a recommendation which has my complete support.

Dr. Robert Berdahl, President of U. T. Austin, presented the following statement:

Statement by President Berdahl

Chairman Rapoport, members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor Cunningham.

The University of Texas at Austin has had a long and proud relationship with the institutions of the Southwest Conference. Seventy-nine years of tradition hold a great deal of meaning for everyone involved. There are bonds of memory and emotion, and sentimental attachments that are quite deep, and human nature wants them to continue.

I would like them to continue. I think everyone here would like for them to continue.

I think we would all like to see a strong, vibrant, nationally competitive and healthy Southwest Conference. Unquestionably, that would be preferable to the disappointment caused by breaking up the relationship.

There has been no rush forward on our part to leave the Southwest Conference. There have been only difficult conversations about whether we must consider the option that is before us. And we must.

If the Southwest Conference were healthy there would be no such talk.

But the reality is different.

For several years, predating my time here, a widespread realization that the Southwest Conference was growing weaker had caused speculation about its ability to survive.

Four years ago, well before I arrived, the speculation had reached such proportions that a recommitment to the SWC was made by The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M to bolster flagging support for staying in the Conference.

At that time, several essential changes were identified that would need to be brought about if the Conference hoped to regain its health.

Attendance was the leading cause of concern. Uneven and unsupportive attendance figures were a cardinal sign of the SWC's weakness. As measured by average attendance in 1992 and 1993, among the eight major conferences, the SWC ranked seventh. I don't need to dwell on the figures. They are well-known.

The University of Texas at Austin has been invited to join the Big Eight Conference. Their invitation is one that we have considered carefully and find attractive for a number of reasons.

First, The University of Texas at Austin has not been invited alone. The attractive nature of the invitation is that it keeps half of the SWC essentially intact. It allows us to continue the traditions that we would continue with every Southwest Conference school if we could. The Big Eight's invitation to Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and Baylor makes it an appealing invitation for us. We choose not to go out on our own. The Big Eight has indicated that their invitation is good only if all four institutions go together.

Second, the invitation is attractive because it makes geographic sense. The enlarged Big Eight Conference would put The University of Texas at Austin in competition with major institutions outside of Texas but within reasonable proximity.

Third, in reviewing the SWC and its potential for the future, we could not ignore the issue of revenue as we look at the future of U. T. and the cost of maintaining first-rate athletic programs with increases in women's athletics. The Big Eight invitation offers us a chance to fund those imperatives.

Fourth, the invitation to join the Big Eight comes from a group of major public institutions of comparable size and strength. Five of the eight institutions are members of the Association of American Universities, as is U. T. Austin.

In summary, as we review the whole question of whether to accept the Big Eight's invitation, four issues stand out:

1. Half of the Southwest Conference would go together, preserving as much tradition as we can
2. The geographic orientation is reasonable
3. The potential revenue matches more closely the institutional imperatives we face, and
4. The size and strength of the institutions are comparable.

For those reasons I recommend that you accept the invitation to join the Big Eight Conference.

Let me close with this note. This is an institutional decision. No one has made it for us, and nothing forces you to consider it nor to decide it. We must be guided only by our sense of responsibility to do what is best for our students, student-athletes, coaches, fans, and supporters throughout Texas.

Thank you.

In response to Chairman Rapoport's inquiry as to whether any member of the Board wished to comment on the matter before the Board, the following comments were made:

Regent Hicks: Prior to and following my appointment to the Board of Regents, I received calls from alumni expressing a widespread belief that the Southwest Conference has for quite some time ceased serving U. T. Austin. I remind you that we are here for education but athletics are important. We need money from alumni and we need money for the support of education. We have to do something, and I believe that the Chancellor and President Berdahl have done a fine job related to this situation.

Regent Ramirez: I agree with what has been said. The time has come to consider what is in the best interests of U. T. Austin.

Vice-Chairman Temple: It is time for us to move on.

Vice-Chairman Lebermann: I have no further comments.

Regent Smiley: Thirty years ago, as I was preparing to go to a university, it was important for me to be a part of the Southwest Conference. A change is sad but for all the reasons that have been set out I believe it is in the best interests of U. T. Austin to move forward.

In summary, Chairman Rapoport stated that a decision to join the Big Eight Conference would not only be a move forward for U. T. Austin but for the State of Texas. He noted that membership in the Big Eight Conference would enhance the University's national exposure as it continues its long-standing tradition of high quality competition in the full range of men's and women's sports.

In response to Chairman Rapoport's inquiry as to whether there was any action from the floor as a result of the discussion of the matter before the Board, Regent Loeffler stated that it was an honor to present the motion for this special meeting. Before making the motion, Regent Loeffler noted that he wanted to expand briefly on the comments expressed by Regent Smiley. In looking back on the legacy of the Southwest Conference, Mr. Loeffler recalled being a member of Darrell Royal's football team at U. T. Austin and stated that his admission to the University was based upon a football scholarship. Regent Loeffler stated that this event established the foundation to be a member of this Board of Regents and the other experiences that he has been blessed with in his life. Mr. Loeffler noted that he had a bit of sadness and remorse but the time had come to accept the reality that the Southwest Conference, as it has been constituted, is no longer a viable organization for athletic competition at the level at which U. T. Austin is committed.

Upon motion of Regent Loeffler, seconded by Regent Smiley, the Board unanimously:

- a. Authorized The University of Texas at Austin to accept the invitation from the Big Eight Conference to become a member of that athletic conference
- b. Delegated to the Chancellor and the President of U. T. Austin the authority to negotiate and finalize the terms and conditions of such membership.

ADJOURNMENT.--Chairman Rapoport reported that a press conference would follow the meeting, and he then announced that the purpose for which this meeting was scheduled had been completed and the meeting was duly adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

/s/ Arthur H. Dilly  
Executive Secretary

March 7, 1994