MT to begin C-USA competition in 2013

University negotiates earlier exit from SBC

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MURFREESBORO —Middle Tennessee State University will become a full member of Conference USA on July 1, 2013, after agreeing Tuesday to separate early from the Sun Belt Conference.

MTSU announced Nov. 29, 2012, that it would join C-USA no later than July 1, 2014. However, the University decided recently to negotiate with C-USA and the Sun Belt to make the change effective with the 2013-14 academic year.

"While we have been proud members of the Sun Belt Conference, it was felt that it was in the best interest of the University, our student-athletes and supporters to accelerate our move to Conference USA," said MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee.

"C-USA's television partnerships, increased bowl tie-ins and larger national footprint will provide better and stronger platforms for our athletics program and our University," McPhee said.

The University has spent the last 12-plus years in the Sun Belt, where it has won eight All-Sports trophies and 54 conference championships.

MTSU, which joined the Sun Belt on July 1, 2000, will leave the SBC with a league-best 50 conference football wins, while also ranking first in victories over automatic qualifying conferences. Other notable milestones in the MTSU-Sun Belt partnership:

• MTSU had four Sun Belt Athletes of the Year and 38 Coach of the Year winners.
• In men's basketball, Head Coach Kermit Davis is just seven wins shy of becoming the SBC's all-time winningest coach, while the women's basketball program has won 80 percent of its conference games.
• The Blue Raiders also played on national television 43 times from 2004 until now.

"We have enjoyed a great partnership with the Sun Belt Conference, which has provided us many avenues to further improve our athletic program," said Director of Athletics Chris Massaro.

"We look forward to our future in Conference USA and are excited about developing new relationships with its member schools," Massaro said. "I am really eager to see how our 2013 home football schedule shapes up."

McPhee said the University will pay the Sun Belt Conference $700,000 to leave the league by June 30.

The university will use monies from private donations to the athletics department to cover the $700,000, McPhee said, rather than tapping into state funding or other revenues. MTSU agreed to pay the SBC half the sum within 30 days and the rest by June 30, the day before it joins Conference USA.

McPhee said MTSU will quickly recoup the money through higher returns from revenue sharing in C-USA.

The C-USA membership beginning July 1, 2013, will include Charlotte, East Carolina, Florida International, Louisiana Tech, Marshall, North Texas, Old Dominion, Rice, Southern Miss, Tulane, Tulsa, Alabama-Birmingham, Texas-El Paso and the Texas-San Antonio.

C-USA's existing media contracts include television partnerships with Fox Sports Media Group, CBS Sports Network and ESPN.

"Middle Tennessee has been one of the amazing growth stories in higher education and intercollegiate athletics. We are delighted to have them with us next year. The university has great leadership and will definitely contribute to our plan for the conference," added Commissioner Britton Banowsky.

The Blue Raiders will begin their quest for C-USA titles in August with eight being available for men and nine for women.

The men will compete in baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, tennis, indoor track and field, and outdoor track and field. The women will take part in basketball, cross country, golf, tennis, indoor track and field, outdoor track and field, volleyball, soccer, and softball.

The sports in which MT will not field teams will be in men's soccer, women's rowing, and women's swimming and diving.

About MTSU:

Founded in 1911, Middle Tennessee State University is the oldest and largest institution in the Tennessee Board of Regents system. It is the No. 1 choice of Tennessee undergraduates and its main campus occupies 500 acres at the geographic center of the state, making it a convenient drive east to the Appalachians or west to the mighty Mississippi.

MTSU also features programs on a 500-acre agricultural campus in Rutherford County; an equine research and science facility in north Murfreesboro; an aerospace campus at the Murfreesboro airport; and a satellite education center in Shelbyville.

A comprehensive university, MTSU offers more than 140 undergraduate programs in eight colleges. The College of Graduate Studies oversees more than 55 programs, including doctoral study.

In its earliest days, MTSU was a teachers college and still educates many of our most dedicated teachers. It also has the largest recording industry program in the nation, strong reputations in business, aerospace, nursing, and mass communication, and a lasting commitment to the sciences and liberal arts. The University Honors College was the first in Tennessee.
I am True Blue:

MTSU is committed to developing a community devoted to learning, growth, and service. We hold these values dear, and there is a simple phrase that conveys them: "I am True Blue." Learn more at www.mtsu.edu/trueblue. For MTSU news anytime, visit www.MTSUNews.com.

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