

An interview with:

ILAN BEN-HANAN
COMMISSIONER DOUG ELGIN
LARRY LYONS
JACK WATKINS
DAVID WRIGHT
GREGG MARSHALL

MIKE HUMES (ESPN): Thank you to everybody for jumping on the call today. This call is to discuss a 10-year extension between ESPN and the Missouri Valley Conference that will take us through the 2023/24 academic year.

On the call we have from ESPN Ilan Ben-Hanan, vice president of college sports programming. Several representatives from the Missouri Valley Conference, including my colleague Mike Kern from the conference who can announce and let everyone know who is on from their side, then Mike will throw it to Doug Elgin for opening comments, then we'll continue to a Q&A.

MIKE KERN: Featured speakers that we have with us include Professor David Wright from Drake, Coach Gregg Marshall from Wichita State, Larry Lyons the director of athletics at Illinois State, Jack Watkins of the Missouri Valley Conference, and Doug Elgin of the Missouri Valley Conference.

Doug enters his 28th year at the Missouri Valley in 2015/16. He's led an experienced staff that has blazed a trail of excellence over past two decades. I'll turn it over to Doug to make his opening statement.

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. We are here in Chicago at Loyola University's School of Communications to announce a long-term extension of the ESPN rights agreement which clearly signals a new era for our conference. For the term of this new agreement which runs through the '23/'24 academic year, the MVC and its member institutions will work together to produce thousands of live athletic events that will be distributed on ESPN-3. The co-branded network that will launch next month, The Valley on ESPN-3, serves to recognize that our conference continues to be committed to remaining

competitive in a fast-changing NCAA Division I landscape. This exponential increase in exposure will bring significant emphasis to men's and women's basketball and every conference-sponsored sport.

A key aspect of this campus-based television model will be the involvement of students in the production of live athletics events, and this student involvement is central and foundational to this agreement. Students majoring in broadcast journalism, communications or other areas of study will receive hands-on experience that will enhance their qualifications and opportunities for employment in television media or related fields.

I'm very proud of the commitments that our president's council and directors of making to our student-athletes and athletic programs and the campus communities in general. We believe ESPN's commitment to our league through this new agreement is an acknowledgment of our men's basketball competitiveness that we can compete at the highest level. Certainly Wichita State's rise to national power and Northern Iowa's strong run in recent years have opened doors for us, but we're seeing a much more competitive league in men's basketball top to bottom.

This new network will provide opportunities to promote academic programs and showcase individuals throughout our campus communities. We are extremely grateful that the Missouri Valley's relationship with ESPN will be stronger than ever. I think today's announcement represents one of the biggest steps the MVC has taken in the modern era. This new network will be a game changer for our league.

We are a basketball-centric league and the extension of our ESPN agreement ensures we will continue to compete on a national stage. Coaches in every sport will use this exposure to recruit more effectively. I would be remiss if I didn't thank Rosalyn Durant, senior vice president of ESPN's College Networks, and Brent Colborne, the director of programming and acquisitions for their hard work in helping to make this strengthened relationship with the MVC possible. I would also like to commend the MVC Associate Commissioner Jack Watkins and media consultant Rick Chryst, who played critical roles in this process.

MIKE KERN: Thank you, Doug. A note to the media. We'll let each individual speaker make a statement then we'll open it for Q&A.

Next we have with us Ilan Ben-Hanan of ESPN, the vice president of College Sports Programming.

ILAN BEN-HANAN: Thank you, Mike and Doug. Good morning.

The Missouri Valley Conference has been a significant contributor to ESPN's college sports content since our early years, and with this deal will continue to play a key role into the next decade, nearly 40 years since our first agreement. This extension places the conference and its member institutions at the forefront of innovative sports coverage. The MVC has been a pioneer in embracing new technology. National coverage of multiple sports that didn't previously exist to millions of fans is the latest example.

We all see the on-campus production initiative as an opportunity for both academic and athletic programs at the member institutions, with benefits that include hands-on experience for students and unprecedented exposure for sports that might otherwise not have been shown on television.

Thanks again, everyone, and I'm looking forward to answering any questions you may have.

MIKE KERN: We'll turn it over to Larry Lyons, director of athletics at Illinois State University.

LARRY LYONS: The relationship between The Valley and ESPN is tremendous news for MVC men's basketball. It will provide national coverage for each Valley school as we produce live events for ESPN-3. Not only are we building a national platform for our teams to showcase themselves, we are extending the reach of all of our institutions to friends, family, fans, alumni, prospective student-athletes and prospective students. I'm confident that each campus will strive to produce the highest quality of live content and use the creative talents of students and staff to tell the story of inside each contest.

MIKE KERN: Professor David Wright, associate professor at Drake University School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He has produced professional basketball, professional football, professional boxing and tennis.

Professor, if you could talk about the bridge between athletics and academics as part of this new agreement on campus.

DAVID WRIGHT: This is an exciting day for Drake University and our production. For 28 years we've been doing sports production at Drake.

We are incredibly excited about the expertise that ESPN will give us and the infusion of excitement of students getting involved in more and more production.

This is a new era. What I really am excited about it is it will put athletes and academics together at a greater level than we've ever before had at Drake. We are very excited about this.

MIKE KERN: Gregg Marshall, if you could speak to the importance of this agreement for Wichita State University.

GREGG MARSHALL: Well, thank you. It obviously gives us an opportunity to play on national television and many different stations across the ESPN brand. We had Game Day here last year. I thought it was tremendous the way they were received as well as the way the league presented itself with the Northern Iowa team coming in as a top-10 team, we were top-10. It just made for great theater with the regular-season title on the line.

I know we have the mandate from the league that our teams are supposed to try to participate in the exempt tournaments that are showcased on ESPN over the holiday season. We've been doing that for several years. We're just excited and ecstatic to be able to showcase our league and our program at Wichita State on ESPN.

MIKE KERN: Thank you very much.

If we could start with our Q&A session now.

Q. Coach Marshall, how do you think this agreement maybe puts you closer or more on par with other conferences which you not only compete against but recruit against?

GREGG MARSHALL: Well, I think any time you can appear on ESPN, it helps you with not just your regional but national exposure. You can go anywhere and get ESPN channels, and now with ESPN-3 from your laptop, which I've learned how to do myself. We have an Apple TV. We can watch just about any game now. The Valley is going to be able to talk about how many times you're on television.

I think every game we played last year was on television. If it wasn't on ESPN or CBS, then it was on statewide in Kansas. That was only a handful of times. We were on regionally and nationally 20 something times last year, which is great.

Now the other schools will be able to say the same thing. I think it really helps us from a recruiting standpoint, as you mentioned.

Q. Doug, what does it mean to the brand to have your Olympic sports more exposed to a larger audience? Secondly, you've been the commissioner for 28 years. There have been a lot of historic moments as commissioner. How does consummating a deal with the number one brand name in the world, how does that rank among your many accomplishments as the commissioner?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: It's right up there at the very top. We've never underestimated the promotional power of ESPN. When you think about networks that you can partner with, you certainly look to the worldwide leader.

I think through the years we've had probably seven or eight different contracts with ESPN. This one kind of fills in all the cracks. As you said, all of our sports programs are going to benefit. I think the programs that are going to gain the most are those that have been exposed the least. Those would be the Olympic sports.

Baseball has been great. We've had three teams in the baseball tournament this year, and many years in past history.

I do think this is going to help our recruiting, our coaches, and every program will have the opportunity to tell recruits and their families they'll be able to watch their sons and daughters play every game of their college careers essentially at home.

Q. Doug, I was curious, what is the financial benefit for the schools out of this deal?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: Unfortunately, we're not in a position to talk about the finances of contracts that we have with media companies. I can't really expound upon that.

Q. Commissioner Elgin, can you speak to the role that the students will have in this production? Is it the full scope of it? To what extent? Is there any concern or consideration for how this would impact quality since you're lining that up against perhaps some more veteran, more experienced crew members?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: I'd like to kick that question to associate commissioner Jack Watkins who has been out in the field. Jack.

JACK WATKINS: ESPN has been largely involved in this process even when we did not have a contract. There have been production professors, if you will, that have been involved with conference calls that have actually made trips to campuses to meet not only with athletic

staff, but individuals like Professor David Wright at Drake, to help convey what ESPN expectations are, that production guidelines are met.

To answer your question about the involvement of students, it can be from either running cameras to directing or producing. The long-term is to have as many students engaged and involved.

This whole process with the build-out on campus began in earnest in September of 2014. As Doug communicated earlier, we are looking for a launch date on ESPN at or around September the 4th. Our institutions as well as ESPN personnel have been in consistent dialogue to move forward and to produce the very best product we can on air.

ILAN BEN-HANAN: In addition to all the benefits and procedures and plans that Jack has described, the opportunity for a deal like this to help deepen and diversify our talent pool, find future people that can work for us or other media companies, is a great asset and part of this deal, something we're excited about.

Q. Doug or Jack, I want to make sure I understand right. In previous years I could watch Valley games on ESPN-3. Educate me how this is different going forward. Secondly, I noticed in the release, there was a buildup, because it talks about a minimum of basketball games in the six-year agreement. Explain how this is going to roll out. What will fans notice different than in past years?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: As Gregg Marshall pointed out, people are becoming much more comfortable accessing live content through mobile apps and WatchESPN. That's going to be the biggest change. Every game we play in conference play in men's and women's basketball will be televised in the early years of this agreement. We're going to start with the court sports, volleyball, men's and women's basketball. There's going to be an eagerness by our conference institutions to produce as many events as they can.

They will have a blank page to write on. They can produce as many outdoor sporting events as they can capably handle in the early years. But we're going to peak at literally 800-plus events a year in the final six years of the agreement.

We're stair-stepping up to that with numbers that we're capable of achieving. This is going to be a big endeavor for our schools. I think there's going to be a lot of excitement on campuses. We're going to tell stories that couldn't be told on linear networks. We're going to have

opportunities to talk about individuals on campus, faculty members, students that are achieving in the classroom.

I just think there's going to be a whole new wave of opportunity to market and sell our schools.

Q. What does it mean for local packages then, like in Wichita? Does that go away?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: It does not. I think this contract very carefully protects our institutional packages at levels of production in past years, most recent years. We also have protection of our regional syndication. That's been very important to us, the opportunity to produce games and put them on the regional networks.

The best part of that is outside of our five-state footprint, ESPN-3 will continue to carry all these games nationally.

Again, I credit ESPN for allowing us to spread our games across multiple networks and platforms. We couldn't be happier with the state of our television operation.

Q. Mr. Ben-Hanan, you talked about the student involvement with the ESPN-3 product, with the involvement of each respective Missouri Valley Conference school. I guess on-air is going to be included with that student help. If that's the case, is there any worry from the on-air quality you are going to get from your student broadcasters?

ILAN BEN-HANAN: Thanks for the question. I think all of these things are a process. I think we have had experience with other students involved in our productions at other schools and conferences. So we're going into this with some expertise and some knowledge of that.

Generally speaking, what we're talking about here from student involvement does not always extend to on-air. Oftentimes we're talking about the ability to help run cameras, the production truck, run graphics, and the ability to build up and ramp up to production and direction roles. Certainly there could be an opportunity here or there for students to have some on-air roles. We've done things in past years literally involving students embedded in the student section, which gives you a perspective you can't get otherwise.

I think, generally speaking, anyone who rises to that role, we have an expectation of professionalism. There would be rehearsals and opportunities that hopefully will allow for a level of quality.

Having said that, there certainly will be a learning curve. I think we have an expectation that if fans are tuning in to a game, no matter how it's produced, that it's credible, that it's professional, and that it is functional and allows fans to enjoy the game every bit as much as they would otherwise.

Q. Mr. Wright, I know from the Indiana State University campus, there's a lot of talk about the students being involved primarily with the on-air stuff. From the Drake perspective, what are you planning on doing with your students?

DAVID WRIGHT: Excellent question. We've been doing video production for about 28 years in my time at Drake, starting from a delivery truck where we had folding tables.

We train our students in a number of the production classes, but now we also have a production division that's doing work for our streaming and scoreboards. We've already made investments in equipment in our production area in the journalism school that are actually very similar to the switcher, a little more powerful than the switcher we will be using in the athletics area. So we are starting to infuse that technology.

What we're really excited about is the expertise ESPN brings on the graphics side, on the 'look' side, and also on the on-air talent side. We're using a lot of students for on-air talent for some of our cable casts streaming now. I think the initial thing will be working on the packages, behind the scenes, really understanding what's going on in the different sports that would be hard for a crew that was coming in from out of town to really know that insight. That's where I see that coming eventually.

I hope with training, the recruiting is going to change. We're excited about releasing this to prospective students to say, Look at the opportunities you have to start working towards this. Hopefully by the time they get to their senior year they'll be up to snuff.

My background says we can do this, we can produce the quality to be on ESPN.

Q. Doug, what is a good audience for the ESPN-3? What are kind of the projections since more and more people are cutting the cord on cable a little bit? Is this a move towards the future?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: I think we'd like to kick that question to our friend in Los Angeles, Ilan Ben-Hanan.

ILAN BEN-HANAN: For us a good audience is fans can see the game. We're really not as concerned with the individual game metrics and trying to determine on a game-by-game basis the total size of the audience. A deal like this is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. And the ability to get these games on in a form that wasn't even possible just a couple years ago, the ability to not have to worry about the shelf space concerns that have always been limiting for the amount of total games that can be on. That's what is game-changing about a deal like this.

Ultimately our hope is that for the student-athletes, their families, the fans of these schools, the fans of basketball in general, even for the selection committees in the various sports to see these teams, I think that has an impact, not just how many people are tuned in to a given game, but a team's quest for championships.

Q. (Question regarding current access and the games moving to ESPN-3.)

JACK WATKINS: Part of this deal, the commitment in the first year is to the core sports of volleyball, men's and women's basketball. But the long-term viability and sustainability of this network is to add more sports as the years go on.

As part of the deal, those previous sports that were webcast will now be the exclusive property of The Valley on ESPN-3.

Q. What kind of investment has The Valley estimated most schools are going to have to put into this to pull this off?

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: I think that varies at each institution. As Professor Wright pointed out, Drake has long made investments in their infrastructure. They've been leaders in institutional telecasts. I think that commitment will continue.

Q. For ESPN, has the network ever done anything like this before with any other conference or any league? Is this completely groundbreaking in its nature?

ILAN BEN-HANAN: We have had some experience working with some individual schools in doing these kind of what we call 'school production deals'. We've had some conversations with some conferences that have kind of opened the door for the opportunity to do this.

I think something like this done at the conference level with the support of both the academic and athletic sides of the house from the very beginning of the deal, that I think is what makes this very unique.

We've had some experience, but doing something this comprehensive from the very beginning is something we're really excited about.

Q. On the investment question. What about the actual equipment, cameras, things like that? Is ESPN going to be involved in helping foot that bill or is that up to the schools?

JACK WATKINS: Any cost will be between the conference and the schools as it relates to the production build-out for our institutions.

Again, it's an initiative. Each school is different in terms of the equipment needs and the infrastructure. Any costs to acquire that equipment or those amenities to make the network viable will be between the conference and our 10 member institutions.

I think it's important to recognize from the Missouri Valley Conference's perspective that we have a co-branded channel mark in The Valley on ESPN, that the conference has a mark of which it's proud. It's a co-branded mark as a leader in the industry. I think that really becomes our calling card from this point forward.

COMMISSIONER ELGIN: One other thing that differentiates our deal from the others is the tonnage, the sheer number of events that are going to be produced by our campuses and by The Missouri Valley for distribution on ESPN-3.

MIKE KERN: Thank you, Commissioner.

Thank you all for your participation today.

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