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**72 hours that saved the Big 12 from demise**

*From a hotel room, commissioner and his staff lobbied hard to keep 10 conference teams together.*

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The Kansas City Star

Monday would not be a day for distractions. Big 12 Conference Commissioner Dan Beebe made sure of that.

Beebe, several of his staff members and the league's television consultants checked into Room 516 of the Hyatt Regency Dallas-Fort Worth a little before 8 a.m. with renewed hope. The Big 12, pronounced dead at age 14 by many on Friday afternoon, suddenly had a pulse.

Coming off a long and sleepless weekend, Beebe and his crew would need all of their focus to handle the upcoming conversations that would make or break the Big 12, which was down to 10 teams after losing Colorado to the Pacific 10 and Nebraska to the Big Ten.

Negotiations with the remaining schools would be tense, but, considering how Beebe viewed the situation 72 hours earlier, he was feeling pretty optimistic.

"Heading into the weekend, he thought he was in the fourth quarter, down 21," a source close to Beebe said. "But he was going to play to the final gun."

In that little hotel room, Beebe would later celebrate his finest hour and what some would call a miracle: Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott had returned to California from his weekend fishing trip in Oklahoma and Texas without one catch, and the Big 12 was saved.

How it happened -- how the University of Texas went from driving the cattle out west to saying "hold your horses," and how the Big 12 went from revenue-deprived to rich in its television contracts, all in a matter of hours -- is a story that will color the perceptions of the league and its members for years to come.

The enormity of it was enough for Beebe to give a nod to a higher power after his work at the Hyatt was done about 7 p.m. Monday.

III

Nebraska Athletic Director Tom Osborne was unapologetic on Friday afternoon in Lincoln as he explained the decision that sent the college sports world into full-fledged panic mode.

Big Red was headed to the Big Ten, and he wanted everyone to know that it was not one team or two teams that broke up a conference but six teams -- a not-so-veiled shot at Texas, which was rumored to be leading an exodus of five more Big 12 teams to join Colorado in the Pac-10. But wait. Hadn't the Longhorns made it clear that they would consider staying in the Big 12 if Nebraska stayed?

According to Texas sports website Orangebloods.com, Longhorns Athletic Director DeLoss Dodds and President William Powers had gathered up their coaches on Wednesday when Nebraska's intention to leave the Big 12 first broke and told them their attempts to save the league were unsuccessful.

"At that point, there's not a doubt in my mind that Texas was going to the Pac-10," said Orangebloods reporter Chip Brown. "William Powers, who is a Cal graduate, had secured votes on the regents board that the Pac-16 was the way to go.

"They really felt like Nebraska was a trusted ally. ... They didn't feel they had as good a relationship with the other Big 12 North schools."

Nebraska's exodus set into motion a chain reaction to Big 12 Armageddon.

Missouri, which also was expecting an invitation from the Big Ten, thought it had an exit. But conference commissioner Jim Delany said he was putting expansion on pause after adding Nebraska.

In Columbia, where the MU Board of Curators met, an uneasy feeling set in that the Tigers might get left behind. MU officials reached out to Delany for what a source said was "a lifeline."

The invitation didn't come, putting Missouri alongside Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State and Baylor as Big 12 schools that suddenly looked like they were headed to the bread lines.

That night, hundreds of miles away in California, Larry Scott was preparing to make their worst fears come true.

### III

The plane carrying the Pac-10 contingent left Concord, Calif., at 7:30 Saturday morning, headed for Oklahoma City. Awaiting them were officials from Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, which were ready to migrate west, along with Texas, Texas Tech and Texas A&M.

By all accounts, this was a formality, the ultimate victory tour for Scott, the former CEO of the Women's Tennis Association who had just taken over the conference in March.

As Scott's plane touched down early Saturday afternoon, athletic directors, presidents and chancellors from the Forgotten Five had spoken on a teleconference. Those schools, as a bid to keep Texas and the others in the Big 12, would eventually agree to forfeit their

share of the buyout paid by Colorado and Nebraska for leaving -- a total a source said could reach \$35 million to \$40 million.

Beebe had no doubt where the remaining North schools plus Baylor stood. They wanted the conference to survive with 10 teams. Beebe spent all day on the phone with officials from the supposedly Pac-10 bound schools, trying to sell them on the same points he made in Kansas City two weeks before at the Big 12 meetings: the Pac-10's revenue distribution was less equal than the Big 12's and the Pac-10's student-athlete and fan experience did not compare with that of the passion-fueled Big 12.

Beebe could talk all he wanted on Saturday, but his league was breaking apart. While Scott met with Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, Southeastern Conference commissioner Mike Slive was visiting Texas A&M. Orangebloods reported that the Aggies were strongly considering joining the SEC and that six of nine A&M regents were leaning in that direction.

The link between A&M and the SEC was news to Texas, which assumed the Aggies were on board with the Pac-10, according to Brown. As Texas' baseball team played TCU in a NCAA super regional game on Saturday night, TV cameras caught Powers, Dodds and Texas football coach Mack Brown sitting together in a club box, deep in conversation. It can only be assumed that baseball was not the topic.

### III

Dan Beebe did not rest on Sunday, and neither did Larry Scott. Beebe was on the phone and said the same lines so often it felt like a broken record: This is what we can do. Does it make you feel more comfortable?

These phrases were delivered most often to Texas officials, who came back to the negotiating table with the intention of making a good-faith effort to save the Big 12 -- this while knowing that they were to meet with Scott on Sunday as well.

Beebe's pitch suddenly was taking hold. A source close to the negotiations told The Star on Sunday that chances of the Big 12 staying together were "significantly greater than 24 hours ago."

There are numerous theories as to why the Longhorns began to have a change of heart, and most of them involve money. The New York Times reported that Texas asked Scott for the ability to have its own cable TV network in addition to the network Scott was planning for the 16-team Pac-10 and that Scott told Texas no, which served as a deal-breaker.

Brown read the situation differently. He said Texas did not want to go to the Pac-10 without longtime rival A&M.

"That's why they did an about-face," Brown said. "They did not want to be the reason that Texas and Texas A&M came apart."

Texas would have been considered the instigator because its board of regents was scheduled to vote on the Pac-10 on Tuesday. A&M's regents would have met to vote on the SEC after that meeting.

With Texas willing to listen, Beebe had his chance, and he had more to offer than he did back in Kansas City. Beebe secured a commitment from ESPN/ABC that it would not alter its current agreement with the Big 12, even though the league had lost two teams and its football championship game. That meant more for everybody.

Beebe also got a commitment from Fox Sports Net, which will negotiate a new TV deal with the league in 2012, that predicted a dramatic rise in revenue for all members. Texas and other schools were also free to pursue their own networks.

He had one final nugget to sell. Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma could dip into a reserve fund -- made up of the buyout money forfeited by the remaining five schools -- if their revenues from the Big 12's new TV deal were ever short of the \$20 million a year promised by the Pac-10.

Meanwhile, Scott had made his pitch in Lubbock, College Station and, eventually, Austin. A source close to the Pac-10 negotiations told The Star that Scott, after his meeting with Texas, thought the Longhorns were about to join his conference. The pillaging of a proud league appeared to be close to complete.

### III

When Beebe arrived Monday morning at the Hyatt, he could sense that his conference was off life support for the moment. But he also knew it hadn't survived anything. At the very least, it was going to be another trying day.

What more could Beebe do to convince Texas it didn't need to go anywhere? He had given the school its chance to have its own cable TV network, guaranteed that it would make at least as much as the Pac-10 was offering in revenue sharing and gave it a chance to maintain old rivalries and traditions. Still, Texas had to sleep on it.

When Texas officials awoke, they were ready to dance with Beebe. Powers was swayed most by the possibility of a cable TV network for his university, and by 9 a.m., Orangebloods was reporting that Texas was angling to stay put.

Later in the day, ESPN said four sources had told the network that a departure of the Big 12 schools to the Pac-10 was "imminent." Brown stood by his report, ESPN backed off and Texas would make an official announcement Monday. Once Texas signed up, A&M, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State would follow, giving their public commitments to the league.

"Until that time," Beebe said, "you never know for sure."

Pac-10 officials, thinking they had the Longhorns locked up, don't know what changed

Texas' mind, according to the Pac-10 source.

When Beebe and his crew turned out the lights in Room 516, they hadn't just saved the Big 12 Conference. The creation of a 16-team Pac-10 would have been the first domino ushering in the era of the superconference and the end of college sports as we know it. The Big Ten and SEC would have had to expand -- this is a competitive game, after all -- and that would have likely left other conferences to live through the Big 12's experience.

On Tuesday morning, the Big 12 office received 20 red and white roses. The card read "unity." It was from the Big East Conference.