

Chicagoland turns down Mount Mercy

Written by Jim Ecker

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Mount Mercy University will have to keep looking for a new conference for the 2015-2016 school year.

The Chicagoland Athletic Conference has turned down Mount Mercy's application to join the league, ending Mount Mercy's best hope for finding a suitable new affiliation.

"We knew this was a possibility," Mount Mercy athletic director Scot Reisinger said Thursday morning. "We obviously are disappointed by it. But we have some backup plans that we're putting into place now."

Mount Mercy currently belongs to the Midwest Collegiate Conference, but that league will be disbanding after this school year due to a lack of members.

St. Ambrose University will be introduced today as the 15th member of the Chicagoland Conference, according to the Quad City Times. Mount Mercy was hoping to join them, but the Mustangs did not get enough support from current Chicagoland schools.

According to Chicagoland Conference by-laws, applicants must receive at least 75 percent approval from current league schools. That would have required at least 11 "yes" votes from the current members that are located in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin.

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"It was a very, very close vote," said Reisinger.

There are indications Mount Mercy received 10 "yes" votes, leaving it just one vote short of approval.

The vote was taken late last week at a league meeting. Now the Mustangs have to find a different league. Reisinger said that process has begun.

"I'm still confident," he said. "It clearly was a disappointment, but it's one of those deals where you expect the best and prepare for the worst. And that's what we did."

Mount Mercy would have been the western-most school in the Chicagoland Conference. Reisinger suspects geography led to his school being turned down.

"I don't know if that is the case, but if I had to guess, yes, that's what I would guess," he remarked.

The Great Plains Athletic Conference and the American Midwest Conference are two possible destinations for Mount Mercy. Reisinger declined to identify any possible new leagues, but confirmed he has reached out to other conferences.

"Yes, we have reached out. I'll confirm that," he said.

The Midwest Collegiate Conference currently has seven members, but Grand View and William Penn are leaving after this school year for the Heart of America Conference. The Heart of America requires members to have a football program, which would eliminate Mount Mercy from consideration at this time.

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Reisinger said there are no current plans to add football at his school. Mount Mercy has begun the process of building a new sports facility that would include a stadium for soccer and track, but football is not currently in the plans.

"To be honest with you, we have not had that conversation yet," he said. "The Chicagoland decision just happened very recently and we have not gotten to the point of talking about adding football."

Mount Mercy, Clarke, Viterbo and St. Ambrose all currently belong to the Midwest Collegiate Conference and need a new home. All four schools applied to the Chicagoland, but only St. Ambrose got in, according to the Quad City Times.

The Midwest Collegiate Conference will have only four schools once St. Ambrose leaves for the Chicagoland and Grand View and William Penn leave for the Heart of America. That's not enough schools for a league with only Mount Mercy, Clarke, Viterbo and AIB remaining.

Reisinger does not think it's possible to save the league by adding new members. "No, I don't think that's a possibility at all," he said.

Mount Mercy belongs to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Reisinger has said there are no plans for his school to change affiliation to the NCAA or any other governing body.