

## Are Mustangs ready for some football?

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 11 January 2015 21:04 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2015 07:26

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Some very smart people at Mount Mercy University could have some very big decisions to make this winter about the future of their athletic department.

The Mustangs are searching for a new league with the impending demise of the Midwest Collegiate Conference and there is no sure path to follow from here, with no blueprint and no obvious answers.

Mount Mercy has applied to the Heart of America Conference, which requires football, and the Mustangs also are talking to the North Star Conference, which does not require football.

Scot Reisinger, the athletic director at Mount Mercy, won't tip his hand either way. Conversations with both schools are ongoing, but it appears there could be a resolution this winter or spring.

What if the Heart of America extends an invitation to Mount Mercy and the North Star does not? And what if the Heart of America does not change its bylaws and insists the Mustangs will have to have a football team in the near future?

What then?

If the Heart of America is Mount Mercy's only chance to join a midwest league, will the Mustangs begin a football program or would they decide to operate as an NAIA independent for awhile?

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Football would be an enormously expensive undertaking with all the equipment, coaching staff, support staff, travel, food, housing and a field, but it could turn out to be a bonus for the school.

Colleges all over Iowa and across the country are competing for new students, and starting a football team at Mount Mercy could attract another 100 students to the overall enrollment. Somebody with a sharp pencil and a sharper mind would have to do the math, in terms of how much revenue Mount Mercy would receive from those 100 new students versus the costs of putting the team together.

The Heart of America Conference will have 12 football-playing schools in the league for the 2015-16 school year and might decide that's enough football teams for the time being. The league could accept Mount Mercy and Clarke University into the fold without football, feeling the benefits of adding those two schools - even without football - would be good for the conference.

Timing could be critical in all this for Mount Mercy. Should the Mustangs take the first offer that comes along? What if the North Star Conference, comprised of six schools in the Dakotas and one in Iowa, goes first and offers the Mustangs a spot in their league?

Should Mount Mercy accept on the spot, or should they wait and see what the Heart of America decides? And if the Mustangs wait, would that offend the good folks at the North Star Conference, who might want a prompt response?

Mount Mercy is planning to build a beautiful new sports complex adjacent to campus, including a stadium for soccer and track that could be modified to include a football field. But if the Mustangs wanted to proceed with football as quickly as possible, they would have done it by now. Instead, they may be forced to add football before they're ready if the Heart of America will not accept them without the sport.

It's an interesting debate: Football or no football? Heart of America or North Star?

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One thing is fairly clear, however. Mount Mercy does not want to operate as an NAIA independent, because that could lead to scheduling problems and a host of other issues, including increased travel costs and eligibility problems for postseason tournaments.

The Heart of America will have three colleges from Iowa for the 2015-16 school year with Graceland, William Penn and Grand View. If Mount Mercy and Clarke join the league, that would be five Iowa schools out of 14 along with five from Missouri, three from Kansas and one from Nebraska.

The Heart of America appears to offer a better geographic footprint for Mount Mercy than the Dakota-based North Star, but the Heart of America might require football and the North Star does not.

It could all come down to football.

What is Mount Mercy going to do?

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