

Mount Mercy applies to 2 leagues

Written by Jim Ecker

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Mount Mercy University has applied to two leagues for conference membership for the 2015-16 school year and expects to learn in January or February if it has been accepted for membership into either one.

Mount Mercy is currently a member of the Midwest Collegiate Conference, but that league is disbanding after this school year. The Mustangs applied for membership in the Chicagoland Conference earlier this year, but they fell one vote short of admittance.

Scot Reisinger, the athletic director at Mount Mercy, declined to identify the leagues it hopes to join, but the options are fairly limited in terms of an NAIA conference that serves the Midwest. He said one of the leagues will vote in January whether to admit the Mustangs and the other league will vote in February, assuming the Mustangs are still looking at that time.

Reisinger said he is "very confident" Mount Mercy will be accepted by one league or the other - or possibly both. "We've gotten good feedback," he said.

Even though the initial talks with the leagues have been promising, Reisinger cautioned there are no guarantees. "The Chicagoland was promising and encouraging too," he noted.

Reisinger said football may become an issue with conference membership. Mount Mercy does not have a football program, although it plans to build a new facility for soccer and track that could be modified to include football.

"Football may be a part of one of those conferences, but obviously that would need board approval (from the Mount Mercy board of directors)," he said. "One of the leagues would probably require moving up that discussion."

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Reisinger said Mount Mercy has not had formal internal talks about adding football, which would be an expensive undertaking that would require an investment of millions of dollars for equipment, staff and housing.

Mount Mercy might have to operate as an NAIA independent in 2015-16 if it does not find a new league. No matter what happens, the school will be looking at significantly increased travel time and costs.

The Midwest Collegiate Conference is a fairly compact league with six schools in Iowa and one in La Crosse, Wis., but leagues like the Great Plains Athletic Conference, American Midwest Conference, the Heart of America Conference and the North Star Conference include teams from Nebraska, South Dakota, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Dakota.

There is even a consortium of independent NAIA schools that's called the Association of Independent Institutions, but Reisinger said being an independent would be a "worst-case scenario."

"We've known all along that no matter what conference we went to, the travel would be greater than what it is now, so that's obviously one of our concerns as we move forward," he said.

Reisinger said geography is the major issue regarding a new conference affiliation for his school. "Our institution and academic performance is never a question," he said. "It's always about location and dollars-and-cents and scheduling."

Reisinger has instructed his coaches to begin scheduling as an independent for the 2015-16 school year, with the understanding that schedules would be adjusted if Mount Mercy is accepted into a new league.

The Midwest Collegiate Conference currently has seven members, but William Penn and Grand

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View are leaving for the Heart of America Conference and St. Ambrose has been accepted into the Chicagoland Conference. The final MCC sports seasons will be this spring in baseball, softball and track.