

Rutgers becomes Big Ten's 14th member

By Brendan Stiles

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As speculated, the Big Ten announced Tuesday that Rutgers University would become the 14th member to join its conference, doing so one day after the University of Maryland was accepted in by the Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors.

With Rutgers coming on board, the Big Ten has now further enhanced its footprint into the East Coast by entering the tri-state market that's prominently highlighted by New York City, which is approximately 40 miles from Rutgers' campus in New Brunswick, N.J.

"This is exactly the right conference for Rutgers," president Robert Barchi said in a statement released by the Big Ten just before the school conducted a press conference on its campus Tuesday afternoon.

Rutgers has been a member of the Big East since 1991. No timetable had been given for when Rutgers would begin competing athletically in the Big Ten. Maryland's move to the conference is effective July 1, 2014.

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany denied an ESPN report Monday saying Maryland and Rutgers would both join the Leaders Division with Illinois switching over to the Legends, saying the athletics directors will make a decision on that sometime in 2013. He also attempted to downplay the role of the Big Ten Network in the conference's ability to expand to the East Coast during a teleconference held Tuesday.

“It didn’t drive the decision. The decision was made on a more macro-level,” Delany said. “What drove us to go someplace else was just the fact there was a paradigm shift and that institutions that get together for academics or athletics have got to be cognizant that they’re competing for students, they’re competing for student-athletes, they’re competing for research dollars, they’re competing for the best levels of collaboration.

“In looking at Maryland and looking at Rutgers, it’s obvious there are rich demographics here.”

As far as how divisions will be realigned, the same criteria as before when Nebraska joined in 2010 are expected to be in play – competitive balance, rivalries, geography. Delany acknowledged that geography might have to play a bigger role this time around as a result of the conference expanding East.

“We are a national conference in many ways, but even geographically, we’re spread,” Delany said. “As a result, I think geography will have to play a more important role in the evolution of the next divisional structure.”