

SEC-ESPN deal means rich get richer - on average, network to televise one conference event per day over next 15 years

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. - The "Who Didn't Vote for Tim Tebow?" story line dominated SEC Media Days two weeks ago, but it was another news story that left athletic directors across the country shaking their heads.

SEC Commissioner Mike Slive officially announced his conference's 15-year, \$2.25 billion TV deal with ESPN - to go on top of its 15-year, \$825 million contract with CBS.

"That's quite a contract that the SEC signed," ACC Commissioner John Swofford said. "There's a new standard set there."

The SEC has won three straight national football championships, boasts six of the top 13 revenue-producing universities in the NCAA and finished first or second in 11 of 20 NCAA sports in 2008-09.

And now, thanks to the infusion of ESPN cash and influence, the rich got a whole lot richer.

"The SEC definitely reached a new level," Kirby Hocutt, athletic director at Miami, said. "Am I worried and concerned about that? Of course. The SEC ... was able to take television revenue to the next plateau. We just have to stay in the same ballpark."

ESPN essentially bought the SEC with its record-breaking package. It led to the creation of the SEC Network, which will be aired not only in SEC country, but also in markets such as Dallas, San Antonio, Chicago and New York.

CBS will get the first choice of football games - such as Florida-Georgia and Alabama-Auburn this year - but ESPN acquired the rights to every other SEC sporting event. ESPN will air 5,500 SEC athletic events on its various platforms over the 15 years, or about 365 per year.

"This deal raises the bar," ESPN spokesman John Wildhack said. "SEC football is unique. With all due respect to the other conferences, there's a passion and an interest here, and it's 365 days a year."

ESPN has television contracts with each of the six BCS conferences, plus several of the non-BCS conferences. But not all television contracts are created equal.

ESPN will pay \$150 million to the SEC each year to be split equally among all 12 teams,

and \$100 million to the Big Ten. The Big 12 gets \$60 million per year, ACC gets \$37 million a year, Big East \$33 million and the Pac-10 \$25 million.

Thanks to ESPN, SEC teams now have significantly more money to spend on recruiting, upgrading facilities and luring top-notch coaches.

"We have become a national brand," Slive said. "Many conferences, the intensity of their following is more regional, and with that has come some benefits to us."

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