A tough pill to swallow

by RG

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The sports world is still reeling from the latest announcement made by the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma of their departure from the BIG 12 Conference to join the SEC. This schedule of this momentous event is set for 2025. A recent online article posted on [www.thespun.com](http://www.thespun.com) dated August 5, 2021, “College Football World reacts to Kirk Herbstreit’s Blunt Message”, written by Andrew Holleran goes into some detail of how Herbstreit, ESPN Game Day Analyst and game announcer for primetime games, feels about this move. According to Herbstreit it is a “loss of tradition.” Herbstreit admits he has been ‘naïve’ about the looming changes of the loss of tradition for some time. The truth is the change has been a longtime in the making and it has only been the matter of time passing that we now are currently living through the final days of the greatness and uniqueness that makes up the sport which is college football.

Previous events within the sport expound on the change. Other than this recent Texas and Oklahoma affair, two months ago in June of this year, the NCAA made a major rule change which now allows players to get compensated by the university which uses their likeness and or image when the school advertises or promotes the team sport. This decision was supported by the US Supreme Court as much to the chagrin and dismay of the colleges and universities financial departments.

The change is really not a change but rather it is the evolution of the entity known as college football. Money has always been the underlying element of college football. In the early years maybe not as much but as time progressed and TV contracts became more and more lucrative and the funnel for revenue for the schools, it now has become the master at the level we all currently see. Even coaches, bargain and negotiate for extended high dollar contracts or make moves based on the best deal for them. Though, I may not have realized it when I watched college football in the 60’s and 70’s when I was younger, as I look back now it confirms why when I was growing up in Georgia on the TV was always the games of Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Texas A&M, Michigan, Ohio State, Alabama, Miami, USC, Pitt, Penn State, and Norte Dame. It was and still is all about the biggest the attraction and generating revenue through key team match ups.

Per the standards of the TV networks of the time, ABC, CBS, and NBC, these teams were the bigger draws, so teams such as the University of Georgia were hardly ever viewed locally during their regular. Brief appearances were only isolated to a bowl game or when in direct competition during the regular season they played against one of the key teams. Fast forward to 2021, now with the existence of ESPN and its multiple channels, this allows for the lesser appealing teams to be aired and viewed by the fans even having live streaming capabilities for fans with easy 24-7 access. Welcome to the modern ultra-age of TV-Media contracts. Plus, colleges and universities now have their own networks to which they can broadcast the sporting events of their teams. The previous years of being paid by the networks, the high dollar amounts schools now receive to play other specific teams, and the high dollar amount of tuition colleges and universities charge, are all contributing to the changes now being seen and will continue to be seen for years to come in college football.

Tradition in college football has changed. Certain rivalry games will always have a place in the sport. But why colleges play certain other teams, and why the popularity of switching conferences has grown, is due to money. The loyalty to a conference by a college or university is only as strong and vital as it financially benefits the school. If no benefit for the school to stay exists, then there is no reason for the school to remain. Just as in the business world, schools go to where the money is and where they can gain the most. Conference loyalty is now based on money and nothing else. Tradition plays very little in the overall scheme of college football.