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Missouri To The SEC: The Dortch Report

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By: Eric SanInocencio
SEC Digital Network



COMPLETE MISSOURI COVERAGE AT THE SEC DIGITAL NETWORK

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- Missouri To The SEC: Barnhart's Take (http://www.secdigitalnetwork.com/NEWS/tabid/473/Article/228826/missouri-to-the-sec-barnharts-take.aspx)

Birmingham, Ala. -- Now the Missouri has officially become the 14th member of the Southeastern Conference, we continue to get reaction and analysis from our stable of Digital Network writers.

Chris Dortch, the author of the SEC "Blue Ribbon Report", sat down and answered some questions about how the Tiger basketball program will fit in the conference.

SEC Digital Network: What is your opinion of the Missouri basketball program and what do you think is the national perception of the Tigers?

Chris Dortch: I think for years under Norm Stewart, obviously a Hall of Fame coach, Missouri basketball had a good reputation and he handed the reigns to Quinn Snyder who I thought really did a good job. As everybody knows he got into a little bit of trouble. Then Mike Anderson came in and did a brilliant job and he left the program in good shape. Some people question the hire of Frank Haith from Miami but he's got Big 12 roots and knows the area that he'll recruit and I believe he'll be able to stock that program with good players.

SEC Digital Network: Where do you see Missouri fitting in the SEC's hierarchy of basketball? Are they a top five program?

Chris Dortch: I think they've got every opportunity to. I was looking at their overall budget for athletics and the latest numbers I found were from 2010. They were 26th in the country in overall spending at almost 46 million and you figure that's pretty solid, then you look and see that would only have placed them ninth among SEC teams in overall athletic spending.

However, they are willing to spend to have a good program and also have been the beneficiary of some donors, the Walton family the Wal-Mart heirs donated a lot of money to their basketball facilities. They are as good as there are in the country. That's an indication that they are willing to spend.

Again, I think if you can recruit and Frank Haith certainly knows the area he will be recruiting, and you got the money to recruit, that's 90 percent of the battle. Get good players and compel them to do your bidding. I think Missouri has every possibility to be in the upper division of SEC basketball.



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SEC Digital Network: What's the passion like for the Missouri fan base and their basketball program?

Chris Dortch: I think there's a lot of passion behind it. I'm from Illinois, right across the river from St. Louis, I can remember – and they still play this game – the braggin' rights game between Illinois and Missouri. They play those games at the Scott Trade Center in St. Louis and that place is always a packed house and ESPN is always there. So, there's a passionate fan base. I think that's the kind of rivalry that Missouri can maintain. Why wouldn't they want to play Illinois? That's just another marquee game for an SEC team to play.

And here's something that I think that people that aren't very good at geography fear or didn't stop to realize, Missouri touches the border of three SEC states: Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky. So it's really in the geographic wheelhouse of the SEC and I think that's a great fit. I think the SEC, unlike some other conferences that have sort of scrambled for some new members in their effort to expand, has really thought about that geographic footprint.

I think first Texas A&M and now Missouri are brilliant acquisitions in terms of that geographic footprint.

SEC Digital Network: Why do you think Missouri fits in the SEC?

Chris Dortch: If you look at the map, Missouri is right on top of Arkansas and they play one another occasionally. Missouri touches Kentucky and Tennessee, I don't think your average person stops to realize that. You think of Missouri, you think Midwest. I think there are some natural rivalry possibilities. Certainly Kentucky fans are going to be able to travel to Missouri if there are any open opportunities, Tennessee fans from west Tennessee and I think there are possibilities to play some neutral site games that could generate some interest: St. Louis, Kansas City, Nashville, Louisville and places like that. I think they are going to bring a fan following and I think they will travel to the SEC tournament as well.

SEC Digital Network: What would the new additions of Texas A&M and Missouri mean to men's basketball in the SEC?

Chris Dortch: I think you got two perennial NCAA tournament teams. I think the die has been cast at both those schools. They play in the NCAA tournament, their fan base is used to that. I think that Texas produces a ton, and people tell you about it producing high school football talent, but there are a ton of basketball players there too and the same for Missouri.

St. Louis is kind of an underrated hotbed for basketball talent and I think if you ask Billy Donovan he will tell you that there are a lot of players to be had from there. He's got a freshman this year, Bradley Beal who's a five-star player and one of the best guards in the country and he's from up there, David Lee is from there. The recruiting base is fertile on both fronts.

SEC Digital Network: Do you think Missouri can compete right away for a championship or will there be in adjustment period?

Chris Dortch: That has to do with if coach Haith can keep the talent base up and I think there will be a little adjustment period. You have to look back to the days of when Arkansas and South Carolina came in. South Carolina had to adjust, Arkansas not so much because they came from the old Southwest Conference and they had big rivalries from Texas and coach Richardson had really gotten that program rolling. I think Missouri is in a good place basketball-wise right now. I don't think it's the kind of place that Arkansas was in when they joined the league so there's going to be an adjustment period. There's going to be a getting used to other arenas and other coaches and styles and given the teams willingness to compete, I think they will fit in just fine.

Got a question for the sec? Send it to secfeedback@xosdigital.com (mailto:secfeedback@xosdigital.com).



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