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By: Sean Cartell
SEC Digital Network

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- Homecoming Tradition Traced To Missouri (http://www.secdigitalnetwork.com/NEWS/tabid/473/Article/228829/homecoming-tradition-traced-to-missouri.aspx)
- Missouri To The SEC: The Dortch Report (Basketball) (http://www.secdigitalnetwork.com/NEWS/tabid/473/Article/228827/missouri-to-the-sec-the-dortch-report.aspx)



BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – With Missouri joining the Southeastern Conference, we continue to get reaction from across the nation about the league's 14th team.

In this special "Q&A," we sat down with Tony Barnhart, one of the country's most esteemed college football writers. Known as "Mr. College Football," Barnhart writes for CBS Sports, and has a weekly column here on the SEC Digital Network.

SEC Digital Network: What is your opinion of Missouri joining the SEC and what do you know about them as a football program?

Tony Barnhart: "I think people have to remember that, as recently as 2007, Missouri was ranked No. 1 and in a position to play for the national championship. If they beat Oklahoma in the Big 12 Championship game, they were in a position to play for it all. Gary Pinkel has been as consistent of a coach as they've ever had. Missouri knows what good football looks like.

The thing that people keep asking: 'Is Missouri a cultural fit?' I don't think there's any question that they are. People forget that there were questions about South Carolina and Arkansas. South Carolina had always been in the ACC or an independent, and Arkansas had been a founding member of the Southwest Conference, as far west as they were. People wondered if they would be a cultural fit. Once you bring somebody into the SEC family, after 3-4 years from now, that question will never be raised. They become a part of that family by being invited."

SEC Digital Network: What can you tell people about Columbia, Mo., and is it similar to any SEC towns?

Tony Barnhart: "Columbia, Mo., is a neat place. You fly into St. Louis for the most part and then drive over. People there get very excited. They have been a very, very consistent football program and all this stuff about them being mediocre in the SEC, I just don't see that. They recruit all over. They have gone into Texas quite a bit and recruited Chase Daniel, for one. I think people will enjoy Missouri – it's a neat campus and a neat University. They're an AAU institution, they're very strong academically and they have one of the best journalism schools in the country. Now we will have an argument about what is the best journalism school in the SEC – is it Missouri or Georgia?"

SEC Digital Network: How much sense does it make to now have 14 teams in the SEC and how does that help the issues that you may see with 13 teams, such as scheduling?

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Tony Barnhart: "Could the conference make it as 13 schools for one year? Sure; the scheduling models are done. The Mid-American Conference has done it, so there are ways for it to be done. But it's not easy; this simplifies it. I don't know what the conference will decide to do. To me, the logical thing would be to take Missouri and put them in the east. It's not that far from Lexington, Ky. If you put them in the East, have Texas A&M stay in the west, then you play the other six teams in your division and have one permanent crossover on the other side. You would make Missouri and Texas A&M the permanent crossover. To me, that is the least disruptive thing to do. No matter what, you want to maintain some of the better crossover games in the divisions."

SEC Digital Network: How much do you think the addition of Missouri will help football recruiting within the SEC?

Tony Barnhart: "I think it always helps to bring new markets into recruiting. Texas A&M brings in the Texas market, this brings you St. Louis and Kansas City. There are a lot of really good football players in that market. That part of the world has always viewed itself as Big 8 or Big 12 territory. The SEC games are already on television there, so you take the SEC brand and the high school recruiters can go in there and open those doors. I think anytime you can expand your recruiting base, it helps."

SEC Digital Network: There are those SEC fans who may not understand bringing Missouri into the SEC. Having witnessed the addition of Arkansas and South Carolina, how similar to you view that situation to the addition of Missouri?

Tony Barnhart: "I think it will be exactly the same. People couldn't envision South Carolina in the SEC. They certainly couldn't envision Arkansas in the SEC, because they did most of their recruiting in the state of Texas. It's a combination of branding – once you get that SEC brand – and playing teams and developing rivalries. I don't know how many times Arkansas and Alabama played before Arkansas joined the SEC, but all of a sudden, you look up and it's an honest to goodness football rivalry. It's the mere fact of playing the games and having fans go to new places. In three or four years, this discussion will disappear. Whether or not Missouri is a cultural fit, it will evolve simply by bringing them into the family. It's like when you bring in someone new to your family. The first two to three times at the dinner table are probably a little awkward, but after that everybody becomes comfortable."

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



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