

AMERICAN AT POW



AS IT CELEBRATES ITS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ON JULY 1, the American Athletic Conference has grown and thrived. Since its reinvention in 2013, The American's student-athletes have excelled on and off the court, capturing four NCAA team titles, including Men's and Women's Division I Basketball championships, and producing 11 NCAA individual champions as well as winning the three New Year's Six bowl games in which it has appeared. In addition, the Conference has produced a Rhodes Scholar among its student-athletes and has established an excellent overall graduation rate. Comprised of 13 institutions across 11 states, the Conference's list of accomplishments has been impressive both in athletic competition, in the classroom and in its communities. It has quickly become a nationally respected and relevant brand and is at the forefront of intercollegiate athletics.

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POWER

SHOCKERS ADD POWER

On July 1, 2017, Wichita State, a longstanding basketball powerhouse, joined forces with the American Athletic Conference as the league's 13th member.

2014 MEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

The UConn men's basketball team saw its remarkable run during the 2014 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament culminate in a national championship with a 60-54 victory over Kentucky at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.



2014, 2015, 2016 WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

Over the past five seasons, the UConn's women's basketball team has captured three national titles and registered an astonishing 188-3 record (.984), which included a 111-game win streak, five consecutive Final Fours (11 straight Final Fours since 2008), and two undefeated seasons – 40-0 in 2013-14 and 38-0 in 2015-16. In addition, legendary coach Geno Auriemma reached the 1,000-win milestone in 2017.



2014 FIESTA BOWL CHAMPIONS

The inaugural football season in the American Athletic Conference saw UCF defeat No. 5 and Big 12 champion Baylor, 52-42, in the 2014 Fiesta Bowl in the Knights' first appearance in a BCS bowl game.





AMERICAN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

PEACH BOWL CHAMPIONSHIP

2015 PEACH BOWL CHAMPIONS

After winning the inaugural American Athletic Conference Football Championship Game, Houston capped a memorable season with a 38-24 victory over No. 9 Florida State in the 2015 Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. The Cougars ended the year at 13-1 and eighth in the final Associated Press and USA Today rankings, marking their highest finish since 1979.

HISTORIC AFFILIATION

In 2015, after 134 years as a football independent, the Naval Academy became a member of the American Athletic Conference. The Midshipmen entered the Conference as the 12th football-playing member and experienced unprecedented success, winning 11 games for the first time in 2015 and playing in the Conference championship game in 2016.

2018 PEACH BOWL CHAMPIONS

UCF finished the 2017 season as the nation's lone unbeaten FBS football team following a stirring 34-27 win over Auburn in the ChickFil-A Peach Bowl, marking the second victory for an American Athletic Conference team in the Peach Bowl in the past three years. The Knights finished sixth in the final Associated Press poll, the best ranking for an American team in Conference history, and ended the season No. 1 in the Colley Matrix, as the school celebrated a national championship.

3 NEW YEARS SIX BOWL CHAMPIONSHIPS

4 NCAA TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS

11 NCAA INDIVIDUAL TITLES

THAT'S AMERICAN POWER

Five of The American's 13 member institutions are located in the top 20 United States media markets (Dallas, Houston, Orlando, Philadelphia and Tampa)

The American was one of six finalists for the 2016 Sports Business Journal Sports League of the Year Award, along with MLB, MLS, NASCAR, The NBA and The PGA Tour

Currently, more than 360,000 students are enrolled at American schools and the Conference boasts 2.6 million alumni

More than 7,000 student-athletes participate in The American's 22 sponsored sports



FROM MEMBERSHIP CHAOS TO NATIONAL SUCCESS AND RESPECT — American Athletic Conference emerges as a dominant force in college athletics

In 2010, the college sports world was experiencing tremendous upheaval as the top Division I conferences were undergoing massive realignment. Every major conference was affected, but none more so than the Big East Conference.

Movement began for the Big East with the departures of Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Louisville and Notre Dame to the ACC; Rutgers to the Big Ten; and West Virginia to the Big 12. The conference then added UCF, ECU, Houston, Memphis, SMU, Temple, Tulane and Tulsa as full members; Navy as a football-only member; and Wichita State for basketball and Olympic sports.

The definitive blow came in December 2012 when a group of schools that did not sponsor football, known as the Catholic 7, decided to leave the conference. These were DePaul, Georgetown, Marquette, Providence, St. John's, Seton Hall and Villanova.

That left the remaining football schools with the challenge of creating a new conference and adding more schools.

"We were left with a situation where we had no name or graphic identity," said Mike Aresco, commissioner of the American Athletic Conference. "We were able to secure revenue from exit fees and basketball unit payments from the old Big East, but to do that, we had to give up the conference name."

In addition to the loss of the name and logo, the new conference lacked a TV deal. They also lost the site of their basketball tournament, giving up Madison Square Garden to the reconstituted Big East Conference.

"We had a lot of negative publicity," said Aresco. "We had to completely rebrand and that was one of the biggest challenges. We also had to keep our league together. That was probably the paramount challenge. We had to make sure that no schools decided to splinter off."

The time frame for developing a new conference was tight.

The Commissioner and his staff orga-



UConn's women's basketball program has dominated the NCAA, winning three consecutive championships from 2014-16.

nized a process to examine and rank names that made sense. At one time, there were 200 iterations. Eventually, the name American Athletic Conference was chosen. Next a TV deal was negotiated despite the conference's difficult circumstances.

By the Final Four in April 2013, the conference was settling into its new name and new TV deal. The American Athletic Conference officially launched July 1, 2013.

Starring in the American Athletic Conference

The conference now includes UCF, Cincinnati, UConn, ECU, Houston, Memphis, Navy, USF, SMU, Temple, Tulane, Tulsa and Wichita State.

These 13 schools stretch out across 11 states, from UConn in the Northeast to Tulsa in the Midwest. The conference sponsors 22 sports. Collectively, the schools boast a student body of 300,000 students, 7,000 student athletes and 2.6 million alumni.

The conference's footprint covers almost 15 percent of the country, close to 17 million households. The American has a presence in three of the top 10 and five of the top 20 markets, including Philadelphia, Dallas, Houston, Tampa and Orlando.

The members' locations overlap with other conferences, so proximity has created opportunities for football and basketball games with ACC, Big Ten and SEC schools such as Georgia Tech, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Pittsburgh, South Carolina and Syracuse.

Several rivalries have developed, including the War on I-4 between UCF and USF, as well as those between Cincinnati and Memphis and UConn and Temple.

Unprecedented Early Success

In its short life span, The American has produced four NCAA team champions, 11 individual NCAA titles, three New Year's Day major bowl victories, two Sullivan Award winners (given to the nation's top amateur athlete) and Outland and Nagurski Award recipients.

The conference secured recognition its first year when 15th-ranked UCF upset sixth-ranked Baylor in the Fiesta Bowl. This past January, 12th-ranked UCF shut down seventh-ranked Auburn in the Peach Bowl. In 2015, Houston, ranked 14th, stopped ninth-ranked Florida State in the Peach Bowl.

"The three major New Year's bowl wins have been absolutely enormous for us," said Aresco. "UCF beating Baylor the way they did, in a decisive victory when they were the biggest underdog in the history of the BCS. The big win by Houston over Florida State when they were a big underdog and then, of course, the UCF game when they were a huge underdog to Auburn."

The UConn women's basketball program has become a dominating force in the NCAA, winning consecutive titles in 2014, 2015 and 2016. UConn's men's program also won the championship in 2014.

"UConn's men's national championship at the very beginning of the league was a



UCF Quarterback Blake Bortles, now with the Jacksonville Jaguars, guided the Knights' upset of Baylor in the 2014 Fiesta Bowl.

SEE AAC, PAGE 39



Houston stunned Florida State with a 38-24 win in the 2015 Peach Bowl.



UCF linebacker Shaquem Griffin, now with the Seattle Seahawks, played an integral role in UCF's upset of Auburn in the 2018 Peach Bowl.

AAC, FROM PAGE 38

magical run that nobody saw coming," said Aresco. "It was huge in terms of giving our conference some instant credibility. The UConn women winning, not only three national championships in the conference, but being in the Final Four every single year and developing themselves into a national brand, was another defining moment. I enjoyed being able to congratulate Geno Auremma (UConn's women's basketball coach) on his 1,000th win and his 111-game winning streak."

The American has kept pace with the other power conferences by being competitive, by building their programs intelligently and by winning.

And the conference approaches football differently. The conference plays football on Thursday and Friday nights to take advantage of the unique national showcase available. That type of national exposure has helped build The American brand.

"You could argue that this conference wouldn't be where it is without the success in football and the big bowl wins against top 10 teams and the 26 P5 wins over the past three years, almost all on national TV," said Aresco.

National Respect

Since its launch in 2013, The American has become a nationally respected, nationally relevant conference. The conference regularly has three teams in the top 25 in football, in addition to the teams in the top 25 in basketball and multiple tournament teams in men's basketball.

In the last five years, the conference has had more than 90 football games with a viewership of one million or more viewers.

"We're still a growth stock," said Aresco. "We've got enormous upside in this conference. Look at the upside UCF and USF are showing. Memphis and Temple, for example, have become major brands and very strong football programs."

In 2016, after just three years in the reconstituted conference, The American was nominated in SportsBusiness Journal's Sports Business Awards for Sports League of the Year. The conference was in good company as MLB, MLS (the ultimate winner), NASCAR, NBA and PGA Tour were the other nominees.

"To be a nominee, whether we won or not, was a major honor," said Aresco. "I also felt it validated us a bit. It was a reward for all the great work our schools had done."

In 2017, Sports Illustrated named The American, "One of the 10 Best Decisions of College Football's Last 10 Years." Said Joan

Niesen in the article, "When the so-called 'Catholic 7' announced they had voted to leave the conference in 2012 amid the realignment frenzy, the remaining schools did the right thing by selling the Big East name and forming their own rebranded conference. 'The American' has a great ring to it and under commissioner Mike Aresco, it has gradually established itself as a threat to the old guard."

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MIKE ARESKO

Commissioner | American Athletic Conference



Power 5, Power 6 or Group of 5

One of the obstacles the reconstituted conference faced was its relegation from its old BCS position to the Group of 5 (American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Sun Belt Conference, Mountain West Conference). That became a branding issue that has been an obstacle throughout the conference's history.

"We never felt we belonged in the Group of 5," said Aresco. "We always felt we were on a separate line. We were closer to the Power 5 (ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, SEC)."

The American has launched a campaign to be included in the P5, renaming it the Power 6. The conference plays as many as 20 to 24 games a year against the P5 in football. Over a 10-year period, it expects to have played 240 games against P5 opponents.

The Power 6 campaign has been vital in the development of The American. It has given the conference a way to showcase and build on its achievements. Successes haven't been just one-offs. When The American won the three New Year's Day bowl games, it became part of the P6 narrative and The American's quest for inclusion. Without that, those games would have had a better chance of being lost to time.

"We're viewed by many people as a Power 6 conference because of what

we've accomplished," said Aresco. "When you win three New Year's Bowl games in five years against top 10 teams...and you win 26 games against the P5, including Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Penn State over a three-year period...and you win a national basketball championship in men's basketball, three national championships in women's basketball and have NCAA golf and track and field champions...when you constantly have multiple teams in the NCAA

Ultimately, The American wants to be a member of the autonomy group, which can pass legislation in certain categories that would apply to them, but not necessarily the rest of Division I. Typically this legislation involves spending more money. The other conferences can opt into that legislation, which The American has done, but they can't vote on legislation or attend their meetings.

Vision for the Future

"My vision is simply to be a P6 conference, to be a fully accepted member of that group, to be part of the autonomy group and eventually to have a contract bowl game on New Year's Day," said Aresco. "And to be what we set out to be, a nationally respected and relevant conference that allows our student athletes to play at the highest level of college sports. That's the kind of conference I believe we are. And I also want to be a conference that has a proud compliance record, that does things right, that has good student-athletes who contribute to their schools and their communities, which they've done."

"We still have a long way to go, but when you look back over the five years, it has been very impressive, pretty remarkable what we've accomplished and I think the future is very bright," said Aresco. "I think we're poised to do even better because it all builds on itself. The more success you have, the more you are going to have. It improves your recruiting, your national profile and eventually, your financial resources."



The American has launched a Power 6 campaign to help drive awareness of its quest to join the Power 5 conferences.