

TELEVISION TALK: Big 12 football

Iowa State football fans frequently contact the athletics department with questions about Cyclone football television coverage.

The most-asked questions are: (1) Why are Big Ten football games televised more often than Big 12 games? (2) When ISU football is on FOX Sports (FSN), why isn't there 100% state-wide coverage? (3) What is Iowa State's administration doing to get the football games on local television? (4) If a football game is not televised, what options do fans have to follow the Cyclones?

In order to help our fans better understand how football television works, we have prepared the following overview.

How does the Big 12 Conference football television package work?

Each member of the Big 12 Conference assigns all of its television rights to the league office. This bundled approach allows the Big 12 to negotiate with various television networks and maximize both the number of appearances and the financial returns for each member institution.

The Big 12's current television package with ABC and FOX Sports provides the conference more than \$50 million annually (more than \$4 million per institution, on average) for the exclusive rights to televise each institution's home football games, as well as men and women's basketball, championships and some Olympic sports. These agreements provide approximately one ABC game and two FOX Sports appearances in football each week.

In order to maximize coverage and revenue, the Big 12 provides both ABC and FSN with exclusive telecast windows. As a result, member institutions do not have viable alternative windows and are not allowed to negotiate their own local TV packages for football.

How does the Big 12 football television package compare to other conferences?

The Big 12 package is arguably the second best collegiate football television package in the nation,

based upon clearances, exposures and revenues. The Big 12 package compares favorably in the categories above with schools in the SEC, ACC, Big East and Pac-10. During the 2005 season for instance, nearly 55% of all Big 12 football games were televised. That is very comparable to the Pac-10 (54%), SEC (58%) and Big East (60%).

Why does the Big Ten package provide more exposure than the other conferences?

Each conference in the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) would like the Big Ten's television exposure and financial returns. The Big Ten football television contract is the most lucrative in the country. Television packages are dictated, for the most part, by demographics (households, TV markets and advertising rates). The Big Ten simply has bigger television markets (especially Chicago and Detroit), and more living alums located throughout the nation than any other conference. If the Big 12, SEC, ACC, Pac-10 or Big East had the same demographics, ESPN and ESPN2 would make the same investment in those leagues.

Why can't all in-state viewers watch the games when they are on FOX Sports (FSN)?

Unlike ESPN, which has one network and one game telecast nationally, FOX Sports (FSN) consists

of regional network from around the country. Each independent regional network has the option of determining its programming based upon the desires of their customers. Most households in the State of Iowa are served by FSN-Midwest, which has fortunately chosen to air Big 12 football games (FSN-Midwest has chosen to telecast Big 12 games instead of Big Ten games). A portion of our state (mainly Eastern Iowa) is served by cable operators, who have selected Comcast SportsNet as their regional sports network because it telecasts Chicago Cubs, White Sox and Bulls games. Comcast SportsNet signed a deal with FSN this fall to include Big 12 games as part of its programming. When conflicts exist with the Chicago pro sports teams, the Big 12 package will be moved to an alternative station on those cable systems in Eastern Iowa.

What can fans do if their cable provider selects a carrier that doesn't air Big 12 football?

Iowa State fans in those areas need to contact their local cable provider and lobby them to carry FSN-Midwest or Comcast SportsNet on its channel lineup. The only way the cable provider will ultimately make this change is if they believe the majority of their cable customers would rather have the Big 12 content. The other option for Cyclone fans would be to switch their television coverage to either the Dish Network or Direct TV, since both of these satellite providers carry regional networks that show Big 12 football games.

Why was Toledo on Mediacom in the state if we can't negotiate local telecasts?

Because Iowa State decided to play Toledo on a Thursday night, we were able to work with ABC and FOX Sports to get approval to telecast this game. While technically Thursday night games are the property of FSN, they granted Iowa State access for the local telecast. Had we played the game against Toledo on Saturday (day or night), the game would not have been televised since ABC and FOX Sports have the exclusive TV contracts for those windows.

Isn't it be better to get local TV exposure than the national coverage and financial incentives we receive from the Big 12 package?

Having access to even occasional national television exposure is critical to the success of our football program, especially for recruiting. In 2005, we played several games on ABC as a part of our Big 12 television contract (games vs. Iowa, Nebraska and Texas A&M). The exposure and recruiting impact from those three telecasts far outweighs those elements on a local telecast. For example, the Texas A&M game was seen in Houston, the third-largest city in the United States and one of the nation's football recruiting hotbeds. There are more high schools in the city of Houston than there are in the entire state of Iowa.

If an Iowa State game is not on television, what can I do to follow the Cyclones?

If a Cyclone game is not on television, fans can follow the game by going to the athletics department's website (www.cyclones.com) and clicking on the "Listen to the Clones" button in the right hand column of the home page. There are two options: (1) a link to a list of radio affiliates on the Cyclone Radio Network and coverage maps corresponding to each station and (2) a link to a Yahoo Audio sign-up page, which costs a nominal monthly amount and provides live play-by-play radio coverage.

Fans can access our free game tracker (updated stats and play-by-play) by clicking on the "Game Day" icon located on the front page of our website and selecting "Live Stats". Lastly, a premium content section (the Clone Zone) is in development and being tested. Full game recaps (a one-hour long show called Cyclone Replay) will be part of that premium content, which will include for a monthly fee, beginning soon.

Final thoughts on television.

College athletics is a big business dictated by major financial decisions that are much more complex than they appear on the surface. We must all focus on things that we can control, rather than areas we can't control. We can control filling Jack Trice Stadium for home football games. We simply can't expect a national television company to invest in the Cyclones if our stadium has empty seats. If we do a better job of controlling what we can, it will go a long ways towards influencing the decisions of television executives.