



## Frontier to continue expansion talks

By **BILL BIGHAUS** Of The Gazette Staff | Posted: Tuesday, December 7, 2010 4:07 pm

The geographic footprint of the Frontier Conference is still likely to grow in the near future, but the actual size of the expanding league won't be known until at least early February.

After two days of meetings at Rocky Mountain College Monday and Tuesday, the athletic directors and presidents from the Frontier's nine schools decided to continue their expansion talks and their timetable now calls for them to meet again at Rocky Feb. 6-8.

That February gathering will also include the presidents and ADs from the four schools who have applied to join the NAIA conference: Dickinson State University, Jamestown College, Southern Oregon University and Menlo College of California.

Dickinson State and Jamestown College are interested in joining the Frontier in all sports, while Southern Oregon and Menlo are looking to become associate members in football only.

Frontier commissioner Kent Paulson said at a Tuesday news conference that all four schools will make presentations to the Frontier presidents and ADs in February. NAIA executive president Jim Carr is also set to join the discussions.

Paulson said the four schools remain enthused and greeted Tuesday's news that they're still in the running to join the Frontier "as an early Christmas present."

Meantime, the Frontier ADs have been split into three committees and have been asked to draft schedules for football, basketball and volleyball that take into account the four schools that have applied, Paulson said. The schedules will also be sent to the four applicants in mid-January and then discussed at the February meeting.

"Based on the input from these presentations, the Frontier Conference presidents hope to make a final decision on our expansion plans following the meetings in February," Paulson said.

That announcement, which some expected on Tuesday, now could come as early as Feb. 8. Paulson said that any expansion wouldn't take place until the 2012-13 school year.

Over the two days of meetings at Rocky, the ADs and presidents tackled a number of issues associated with expansion, including travel costs, scheduling, league structure, safety and time away from classes for student athletes.

Paulson said he is as convinced today that expansion will happen "as I was when we first started talking about this" last summer.

"Quite frankly, I think we're ahead of schedule," he said. "My hat's off to the presidents and ADs for taking a really large, complex issue and working very expediently through that process"

Paulson also said that no major roadblock emerged at the Frontier meetings.

"I really thought that everyone felt like they could speak freely," he said. "I don't think there was anything that was off the table. I can tell you there were certain plans that seemed to have a little more play ..." including scheduling.

"We're definitely on the right page I do believe," Paulson added.

Rocky president Michael Mace, who also serves as president of the Frontier's council of presidents, also described the meetings as productive.

"When you have this many teams scheduling so many games two or three years out, you've got to give them time to coordinate themselves and make plans to come in," he said. "It's more of a process of getting all the stars lined up in order.

"We do feel like we've moved much faster than we thought we ever would."

And Mace said Rocky continues to support expansion.

"We are thrilled, absolutely thrilled," he said. "We also see this expansion as an opportunity for other colleges to look at the Frontier Conference as a very stable and exciting conference to be a part of.

"So we think it opens the door for other opportunities for other colleges as well."