

## **Frontier to hold off on expansion decision**

*George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor*

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The Frontier Conference might get bigger. But for now, it will have to wait.

League officials announced Tuesday afternoon that the conference will wait until February to decide on expansion plans.

Frontier athletic directors and league officials gathered in Billings on Monday and Tuesday to discuss applicants that wished to join the conference, and originally, Frontier Conference Commissioner Kent Paulson had said a vote would be held during those meetings to invite or not invite new schools.

Instead, this week saw no vote take place as the process has taken on some new turns.

In the fall, the league sent out applications to seven schools with an Oct. 28 deadline for those applications to be turned in to the Frontier. At the time of the deadline, only Dickinson State University sought full membership to the Frontier, while Southern Oregon and Jamestown College sought membership as football only schools. Menlo College in California also expressed interest as a football-only member although there was no definitive confirmation there. The two remaining Dakota Athletic Conference members did not seek admittance to the Frontier, while Azusa Pacific also turned down any interest in the league.

While DSU seemed like a no-brainer to be added to the Frontier as a core member, things have taken some new turns this week in the league's expansion plan. Jamestown is now looking to be added as a core member as well, while Menlo and SOU still seek football-only membership.

With so many possible expansion scenarios out there, league officials decided to put off making any decisions until February. Monday and Tuesday's meetings then saw officials discuss a number of issues associated with expansion, including travel costs, scheduling, league structure, safety and time away from classes for student athletes.

The results of those discussions meant several more steps were added to the expansion process according to MSU-Northern Athletic Director Mark Samson. Samson said, there is a scheduled gathering of league officials in February, and at that time, officials from all of the schools seeking admittance to the Frontier will be present and will be allowed to make presentations to the current Frontier.

Also, current league AD's have been asked to split up into committees to draft two-year mock schedules for football, basketball and volleyball, outlining what the league's schedule and travel issues would look like with all of the different possible scenarios in regards to expansion. Samson will be a part of that process.

After Tuesday's meetings in Billings wrapped up Paulson held a press conference at Rocky Mountain College, confirming that the league is indeed holding off on voting to expand and also confirming that new meetings will be held in Billings Feb. 6-8. He also stated that any expansion would not go into effect until the 2012-2013 school year.

"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.

And while no decision was made this week in Billings on the future of the league as it relates to new schools, Paulson seemed optimistic that expansion will go forward.

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