

# History of Missouri Valley Conference

By Dr. R. G. Clapp

During the early part of the college year of 1906 and 1907 Professor Clark W. Hetherington of the University of Missouri conceived the idea that an intercollegiate athletic organization similar to the Intercollegiate Conference (otherwise known as the Chicago Conference or "Big Nine"), would materially improve athletic relations between the larger institutions situated in the territory to the west and south of that controlled by the Intercollegiate Conference. Accordingly invitations were sent to a number of these state universities and several other large private institutions for the purpose of considering the advisability of such an organization. A meeting was held in Kansas City on January 12, 1907, was attended by representatives of the state universities of Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri and Washington Universities. Most of the institutions represented were favorable to such a plan and a tentative draft of a constitution and by-laws, based primarily on the Chicago Conference rules and regulations but with modifications of the more drastic regulations, was considered. Each representative was requested to refer the proposed constitution to the faculty committee on athletics in his institution. On February 7th of the same year the representatives of the above universities with the exception of Nebraska, met in Kansas City again and perfected a formal organization known as the Missouri Valley Conference of Faculty Representatives. The proposed draft of rules and regulations was adopted with some slight modifications.

The University of Nebraska refused to cooperate in this movement owing to the fear on the part of certain members of the athletic board that it would require her to enforce the "one-year-residence" rule, instead of the one-semester of residence in the institution—and certain other restrictions which Nebraska was not enforcing at that time except when required to do so by a few members of the Chicago Conference which refused to schedule with Nebraska under other than their own rules.

A few months after the organization of the Missouri Valley Conference, Iowa State College and Drake University accepted an invitation to join.

The rules of the Chicago Conference required its members in competition with institutions not members of their organization where such institutions were considered of equal rank athletically, to insist upon the enforcement of conference rules of eligibility by both teams. The Missouri Valley Conference also adopted a similar rule. Inasmuch as practically all of the stronger universities in the middle west were members of one or the other of these organizations it was practically impossible for the University of Nebraska to compete with her logical rivals, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Iowa State College, etc., except under the Intercollegiate Conference of Missouri Valley Conference rules. The matter soon resolved itself into a case of "Taxation without Representation," athletically speaking. Those in control of the situation soon recognized the fact that it was much better policy to become a member of the Missouri Valley Conference,—thereby securing for the University of Nebraska a vote on the formation of these eligibility rules,—than to be on the outside and be obliged to compete under rules, in the adoption of which they had no voice. Therefore on March 11, 1908, the Nebraska Athletic Board voted unanimously to accept the invitation to join the new conference,

It was commonly understood that the University of Iowa had co-operated in the formation of the Missouri Valley Conference in order to use her influence to secure the adoption of Chicago Conference rules by the new organization. As time went on, it became more difficult for this institution to fulfill her obligations to both the Chicago and Missouri Valley Conferences. The situation finally became so acute that on May 26, 1911, the University of Iowa presented her resignation as a member of the Missouri Valley Conference. From time to time, various institutions in the Missouri Valley territory applied for admission to the conference, but none of these applications were favorably considered until the Kansas State Agricultural College was voted in on December 6, 1912.

It has always been the policy of the Missouri Valley Conference to put in force such additional restrictions regarding eligibility as seemed necessary, in such a way as to avoid needless opposition. Hence no retroactive legislation of any kind has ever been passed by the conference. For example, action was taken by the conference at the May meeting, 1911, barring graduate students from competition; but this rule was not made operative until September 1, 1912. On this account it raised very little opposition inasmuch as it did not apply to any upper classman eligible for competition at the time the action was taken.

The most drastic athletic legislation ever taken by the Missouri Valley Conference institutions was that adopted by the regents and governing boards at their meeting in Kansas City on April 19, 1910. The more important restrictions made at this meeting were as follows

Abolition of the training table, limiting freshmen to intra-university competition, limiting members of intercollegiate teams to two sports in one academic year, forbidding athletic competition on Thanksgiving Day, requiring all intercollegiate football games to be played on college, abolishing the hammer throw as an intercollegiate track event by members of the conference, and requiring that all athletic coaches be regular members of the teaching staff employed by the governing board of the institution for the full academic year. Practically all of this legislation has proven desirable and almost no protest was raised because of these enactments, yet the same restrictions under similar circumstances by the faculty members of the Missouri Valley Conference would have raised a storm of protest in practically every institution in the conference.

There can be no question but that the Missouri Valley Conference has been largely responsible for the distinct elevation of the standards of sportsmanship in the colleges and universities of the Missouri Valley and that the organization will continue to be the predominant factor in maintaining and developing further the high plane that has already been set. While the University of Nebraska joined the Missouri Valley Conference under conditions that were not entirely to her credit and occasionally some single action taken by the conference has seemed unnecessary and undesirable,—as the time went on, the large majority of the faculty and students of the university recognized more and more the necessity for, and reasonableness of most of the present regulations—as well as the general benefits which Nebraska has derived from her membership in the organization.



Dr. R. G. Clapp