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New Big 12 begins as elite conference

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

ST. LOUIS — For a baby, the Big 12 Conference is booming.

The new league begins this fall after seven of its members finished the 1995 football season ranked in the final top 25.



Hatchell

Six of those teams won bowl games. Eight Big 12 players were named first-team All-Americans. And Nebraska winning its second straight national title marked the 15th time a school in the Big 12 finished No. 1 in one of the two major polls.

To start the inaugural season on a good note, six teams are ranked in the preseason top 25, eye-popping numbers for a league that no other conference can match.

"I grew up in the Big Eight and worked in the SWC," Big 12 Commissioner Steve Hatchell said at the league's media day last month in St. Louis. "And I like the idea that we are starting off very much at the top, because it's well deserved."

The conference is split into two di-

visions: The north — Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas State, Kansas, Iowa State and Missouri; and the south — Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Baylor (formerly of the Southwest Conference) Oklahoma State and Oklahoma. The divisional champions will meet in the Big 12 championship game, Dec. 7 in St. Louis.

Regardless of whether this conference is a merger or simply an expansion of the Big Eight, everyone involved agreed that the Big 12 is a powerhouse.

Texas A&M Coach R.C. Slocum said now is the perfect time for this league to form.

"When you're a coach or a player, you always want to be right in the middle of what's going on," Slocum said.

Although every coach, player and athletic director involved seems thrilled with the conference, Kansas State Coach Bill Snyder still reflects on the past.

"I was in the Big Eight for seven years, and I was fortunate to be in that conference for that period of time," Snyder said. "I had fallen in love with the Big Eight Conference."

"It's sad to see it moving from the Big Eight as we know it to the Big 12 just because I have great respect for the Big Eight."

"It is undeniably the best college football conference in the United States."

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