

Duncan helps shape Big 12

The former Sooner athletic director becomes a top conference administrator.

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

With four football teams currently ranked in The Associated Press Top 25, the Big 12 is easily recognized as one of the top conferences in the nation.

Donnie Duncan, the conference's director of football operations, is prepared to make sure Big 12 football stays that way.

"I feel very positive," Duncan said. "I think that in many instances, it's mind boggling with the universities that make up the Big 12.

"All the coaches tell me that we have a national presence and tradition. It has been that way for decades, and that's not going to change."

Duncan, who recently left his job as the athletic director at Oklahoma — a position he held since 1986 — said leaving the Sooner state was a bitter-sweet decision.

"Any time you're involved on a college campus and in a college town, you have a lot of friendships," he said. "But the job that I currently have embodies a lot of the things I have done over the years."

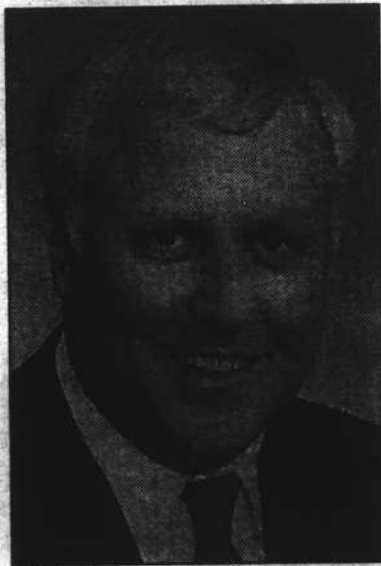
Duncan oversees everything from selection of officiating crews to ticket sales for the Big 12 championship game. He said he cherishes the opportunities to meet new people and keep in touch with old friends.

Duncan said he will be an active voice in negotiations to keep the conference aligned with at least five major bowls. Currently, the Big 12 is aligned with the Cotton, Holiday, Alamo, Aloha and Copper Bowls.

"I am very involved in alliance discussions," he said. "We will diligently watch our bowl structure to make sure our teams have good bowl games and good destinations for our teams that have worked for that all season."

Postseason bowl appearances, as well as the Big 12 championship game Dec. 7 in St. Louis, should give the conference the national exposure it needs to establish a reputation of excellence, Duncan said.

"We're still in a meshing process,



DONNIE DUNCAN oversees all aspects of Big 12 football.

both in the conference and nationally," he said. "We have to be good listeners in everything. I think any time you combine conferences, there will be a lot of discussion."

Having a north and south division in the conference was a major question when talks of merging the Big Eight and the Southwest Conference began. But Duncan said now that the Big 12 is a reality, the conference will start to become a cohesive unit.

"The competition helps that a lot," he said. "We needed very badly to get into competition with our sports, especially football. Once you begin that process, you begin to grow together as a conference."

Duncan said he didn't think old rivalries, such as Nebraska and Oklahoma, would die with the new conference alignment.

"The Nebraska-Oklahoma game will always be a special game, even though it will only be played half as much," Duncan said.

Although NU and OU will play this fall and next season, teams from the North Division and the South Division will not play every season under the conference schedule.

"Other rivalries will be just as good, though," Duncan said, "because when you look at things, we're in an era of parity. The Big 12 isn't a mile wide and an inch deep. It's a mile wide and a mile deep."

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