

West Virginia settles lawsuit, headed to Big 12

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) West Virginia University announced Tuesday it has settled a lawsuit with the Big East for an unspecified amount, clearing the way for the Mountaineers to join the Big 12 in July.

Athletic Director Oliver Luck said the terms of the deal were confidential and WVU wouldn't release details. But Luck said no state, taxpayer, tuition or other academic dollars will be used in the settlement.

A person familiar with the agreement said the settlement totaled \$20 million but did not know how much money would come from the university and how much the Big 12 may contribute. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because financial terms were not being made in the announcement of the agreement.

Luck said the funding will come only from private sources and money that athletics raised independently.

WVU has already paid half of the required \$5 million exit fee to the Big East.

Luck planned a news conference to discuss the deal later Tuesday morning.

WVU sued the Big East in Monongalia County Circuit Court in Morgantown in November, challenging its bylaws in a bid to join the Big 12 in time for the 2012 football season.

The Big East countersued in Rhode Island four days later, arguing that WVU had breached its contract with the conference and should remain in the Big East for another two years as required in the bylaws. In late December, the judge there denied WVU's motion to dismiss.

Luck said the Big 12 gives WVU ``significant advantages' over the Big East.

``The Big 12 is a strong and vibrant conference academically and athletically,' he said in a statement. ``We look forward to the potential academic and athletic partnerships and financial opportunities that membership in the Big 12 offers.'

WVU President James Clements called the partnership with the Big 12 ``an investment in WVU's future.'

Big East Commissioner John Marinatto had repeatedly said West Virginia would not be allowed to leave until the 2014 football season.

But in a statement Tuesday, Marinatto said the board of directors voted to terminate WVU's membership in the conference as of June 30. Marinatto said the board agreed to the deal because WVU was willing to drop its lawsuit and pay an exit fee ``well in excess of that required by the bylaws.'

He said WVU has agreed to have the West Virginia court enter a judgment that declares the Big East's bylaws ``valid and enforceable.'

With its recent additions, Marinatto said, ``the future for the Big East Conference has never been brighter.'

Boise State, the University of Central Florida, the University of Houston, the University of Memphis, San Diego State University, Southern Methodist University and the United States Naval Academy have all recently joined the conference.

While the legal fight played out, the Big 12 was put in limbo, unable to release a football schedule for next season. Now the WVU's membership for 2012 is secured, that schedule should be out soon.

The Big East still has work to do to figure out how next season will play out. Pittsburgh and Syracuse announced in September they are leaving for the Atlantic Coast Conference, but have said they will not challenge the Big East's notification rules.

That leaves the Big East with seven football teams for 2012 and a hole in the schedule that could leave its remaining members scrambling to find a game so late unless one of its future members can be convinced to join a year early.

Boise State, which is joining the Big East in football only, has been approached about leaving the Mountain West early.