

Big East confirms Catholic 7 schools to depart July 1

Brian Roewe | Mar. 8, 2013 NCR Today

The exodus of the Catholic 7 is official.

The commissioner of the Big East Conference announced Friday that the separation of seven Catholic schools and the remaining members will become effective July 1.

"I am pleased that this agreement has been reached," Commissioner Mike Aresco said. "With the long-term well-being of our outstanding institutions and their student-athletes of paramount importance, each group worked through a number of complex issues in an orderly, comprehensive and amicable manner marked by mutual respect. We part ways as friends and colleagues and look forward to the success of both conferences."

In a statement from the presidents of the seven schools, they expressed gratitude to Aresco "for spearheading an agreement that truly represents the best path forward for each of our great institutions and the thousands of student-athletes who compete for our schools annually.

"It is a great credit to Mike, our colleagues, and all involved that we were able to work through a host of highly complex and time-sensitive issues in such a short period of time," they continued. "We are pleased that we reached this amicable and mutually-beneficial separation by approaching each issue with a spirit of cooperation and shared respect."

The Catholic 7 will take with them the Big East name, [sources have told ESPN.com](#) [1], as they embark to establish their own basketball-driven conference. Like the old Big East, the new conference will continue holding their conference tournament in New York's Madison Square Garden. It is expected to finalize a T.V. rights deal with Fox Sports Network and will begin competition in Fall 2013.

The seven schools include DePaul University in Chicago, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., Marquette University in Milwaukee, Providence College in Rhode Island, Seton Hall University in South Orange, N.J., St. John's University in New York City, and Villanova University in Pennsylvania.

Numerous reports have fellow Catholic schools Xavier University in Cincinnati and Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., joining the Catholic 7. Butler University, a private, non-religious-affiliated school, is expected to round the members to 10. The conference could seek to add two additional members by the 2014-15 school year, possibly Saint Louis University and the University of Dayton in Ohio.

Rumors of the split began in December, with the seven schools quickly gaining the "Catholic 7" moniker among the media and fans. Early speculation focused on the possibility of an all-Catholic conference, but the likely addition of Butler has cooled those fires.

Several athletic directors of Catholic 7 schools released statements, as well, echoing the mutual and amicable split Aresco described.

"The announcement today that we have reached a mutual separation is a positive step and an exciting development for our competitive athletics program," said Lee Reed, Georgetown University athletic director, in a statement. "This has been a very amicable and transparent process, coordinated by the leadership of all the schools involved."

"We are excited to start this new era of excellence in intercollegiate athletics - a move that will allow us to enhance the elite status of our athletic programs, led by men's basketball," said Larry Williams, vice president and director of athletics for Marquette.

DePaul president Fr. Dennis H. Holtschneider offered his appreciation of the cordial process, as well: "We are excited about the opportunities this endeavor will afford our student-athletes, coaches and fans. We wish the ongoing football members the very best as they establish their footprint in the college football landscape."

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