



PC Friars

Tranghese plans to leave as Big East commissioner in year

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PROVIDENCE - After 30 years of loyal service and 19 in the boss' chair, Mike Tranghese has decided that it's someone else's chance to steer the Big East.

Tranghese said yesterday that he will step down as commissioner in June 2009. A resident of Bristol, the 64-year-old isn't ready to retire but will leave the job that's defined his career.

"It's time for someone else. It's been 30 years, and 19 years as commissioner," said Tranghese. "I'm going to miss the games. That's the best part. I'm spoiled. I've had the best seat in the house for the last 30 years."

Tranghese has always harbored a distinct fear of flying, which he says is getting worse with years. He's always scheduled trips to meetings, bowl games and Final Fours around the vagaries of the airline industry.

"I have an incredible fear of flying that's only gotten worse. I really detest it," he said. "In order to do this job right, you have to go out and see all of our people."

Tranghese said the time was right to leave next June because the Big East is on strong ground. The conference expanded to 16 schools three years ago, and the move has made the basketball conference the deepest and strongest it's ever been.

While coaches groan about the strength of the league, with many claiming it's too difficult, the results have been smashing. In two of the three years, the Big East has sent a record eight teams to the NCAA Tournament. Those bids help pour millions of dollars into the conference's coffers.

On the football side, recent improvements at Rutgers, Connecticut and South Florida have solidified a group that was harmed by the exit of Boston College, Miami and Virginia Tech four years ago to the ACC. The Big East is an established member of the Bowl Championship Series and has beaten champions of the SEC, ACC and Big 12 in high-profile bowl games.

"I wanted to leave at a time when I thought things were in place and our presidents can go out and hire someone who can be successful," he said. "If I thought we were in trouble in any way, I would not leave right now."

Tranghese left his publicist job at Providence College in 1979 to become the Big East's first employee when Dave Gavitt pushed to bring together the top basketball schools in the East. Gavitt was the first commissioner, but Tranghese became the "details guy" and ran the league from an office on South Main Street in Providence.

When Gavitt left the commissioner's post to run the Boston Celtics, Tranghese was the easy choice to succeed him.

But his tenure would be different from his mentor's. Football became the driving force in a series of expansion discussions that Gavitt largely avoided. Tranghese embraced the change and created a Big East football conference that quickly snapped up the University of Miami, and before long was winning national championships in football and basketball.

"I got the job on June 21 and two weeks later we had an emergency meeting about Miami and football," Tranghese said. "I've worried about (the conference's) survival too much. It's been a lot of years dealing with the makeup of the league and making sure it would work."

The biggest test on that front came when the ACC enticed BC, Miami and Virginia Tech to leave for a greener financial future. The league came close to splitting into football-basketball factions, but the presidents of football schools such as Pittsburgh, Syracuse and West Virginia voted to stay together and grow the conference to 16 schools.

At the time, the two sides agreed to stick together until at least 2009-10.

While fans of some of the eight football schools insist that they need a ninth partner solely for scheduling reasons, Tranghese doesn't see any impetus for a split.

"There is a five-year plan, but that does not say you have to do anything, and I spoke with three presidents of football schools at our meetings (last month) who are ecstatic with the way everything has worked out.

"We have too many good things going for us, for all the schools," he added. "What do you gain by separating? Maybe a little money. I know the football schools wouldn't be on TV as much, and they wouldn't play (the conference basketball tournament) in Madison Square Garden. I can tell you that. Everyone is much more educated on all the issues than they were a few years ago."

Tranghese insists he is not retiring. He says he'd like to work at a slower pace, work on his golf game and perhaps even teach.

Gavitt, who sat in on a conference call with his protégé yesterday, said, "for someone who put his heart and soul into creating this thing, this is a bitter-sweet day. This league has been really well cared for."

Who will be the next Big East commissioner? Tranghese said he'd provide guidance on that issue but would leave it up to the conference's presidents council.

Former Providence College athletic director John Marinatto is currently the Big East's senior associate commissioner.