

USC And UCLA Will Officially Join Big Ten In 2024



Like the old British Empire, the sun never sets on the Big Ten.

On Thursday, the conference announced that USC and UCLA would become the 15th and 16th teams in their league in 2024, meaning the Big Ten will stretch from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, from the west to the east.

According to several sources, Big Ten presidents and chancellors voted and approved USC and UCLA as the newest league members. The vote was unanimous. The sources also confirmed that the California schools began the conversation between parties, and the conference obliged.

“Over the past three years, we have worked hard to ground our university decisions in what is best for our students,” USC President Carol L. Folt said. “With the Big Ten, we are joining a storied conference that shares our commitment to academic excellence and athletic competitiveness, and we are positioning USC and our student-athletes for long-term success and stability amidst the rapidly evolving sports media and collegiate athletics landscapes. We are delighted to begin this new chapter in 2024.”

USC athletic director Mike Bohn said the Big Ten offers USC the best home for academics and athletics. Southern California is a member of the Association for American Universities, an exclusive group of public and private universities dedicated to improving lives through education. The Trojans have more than 550 student-athletes who compete in 21 sports. They also have 250 coaches and staff.

UCLA Chancellor Gene D. Block wrote a letter advising the school’s community of the monumental change. Like Folt and Bohn, Block focused on the academic and athletic opportunities offered in the Big Ten. He thanked the Pac-12 for its efforts to support the school in recent decades but also looks forward to the growth that may come within a new league.

“UCLA has deeply valued our membership in the Pac-12 for many years, and we intend to be a member of the conference for the next two years,” Block said. “We have grown close to the other member schools and have tremendous respect for their commitment to the student-athlete experience. The Pac-12 has always shared our values and continues to innovate, working hard on behalf of its student-athletes and many fans.

“At the same time, each school faces its own unique challenges and circumstances, and we believe this is the best move for UCLA at this time. For us, this move offers greater certainty in rapidly changing

times and ensures that we remain a leader in college athletics for generations to come.”

Officials from USC and UCLA recognize that big changes await the schools in the future. Those changes create uncertainty for the Pacific-based conference.

“While we are extremely surprised and disappointed by the news coming out of UCLA and USC today, we have a long and storied history in athletics, academics and leadership in supporting student-athletes that we’re confident will continue to thrive and grow in the future,” an official Pac-12 release stated. “We’ve been long known as the Conference of Champions, and we’re unwavering in our commitment to extend that title. We will continue to develop new and innovative programs that directly benefit our member institutions, and we look forward to partnering with current and potential members to pioneer the future of college athletics together.”

The Big Ten’s next steps look much different. Conference commissioner Kevin Warren said the USC and UCLA submitted written applications from the universities, which Warren promptly sent to the board of presidents and chancellors.

According to a Big Ten press release, the board considered four primary principles when considering the admission of USC and UCLA, including academics and culture; student-athlete welfare, competition and logistics; commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in sports; and financial sustainability. That model allows the conference to analyze the schools effectively.

“As the national leader in academics and athletics for over 126 years, the Big Ten Conference has historically evaluated its membership with the collective goal to forward the academic and athletic mission for student-athletes under the umbrella of higher education,” Warren said. “The unanimous vote today signifies the deep respect and welcoming culture our entire conference has for the University of Southern California, under the leadership of President Carol Folt, and the University of California, Los Angeles, under the leadership of Chancellor Gene Block.

“I am thankful for the collaborative efforts of our campus leadership, athletics directors and Council of Presidents and Chancellors who recognize the changing landscape of college athletics methodically reviewed each request, and took appropriate action based on our consensus.”

The Big Ten’s release also states that the additions of USC and UCLA make the conference a model league for academic and athletic success.

“Adding the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California continues the conference’s legacy of transformation and innovation in college athletics,” the conference stated. “The addition of the two universities remains subject to negotiation of final terms.”