

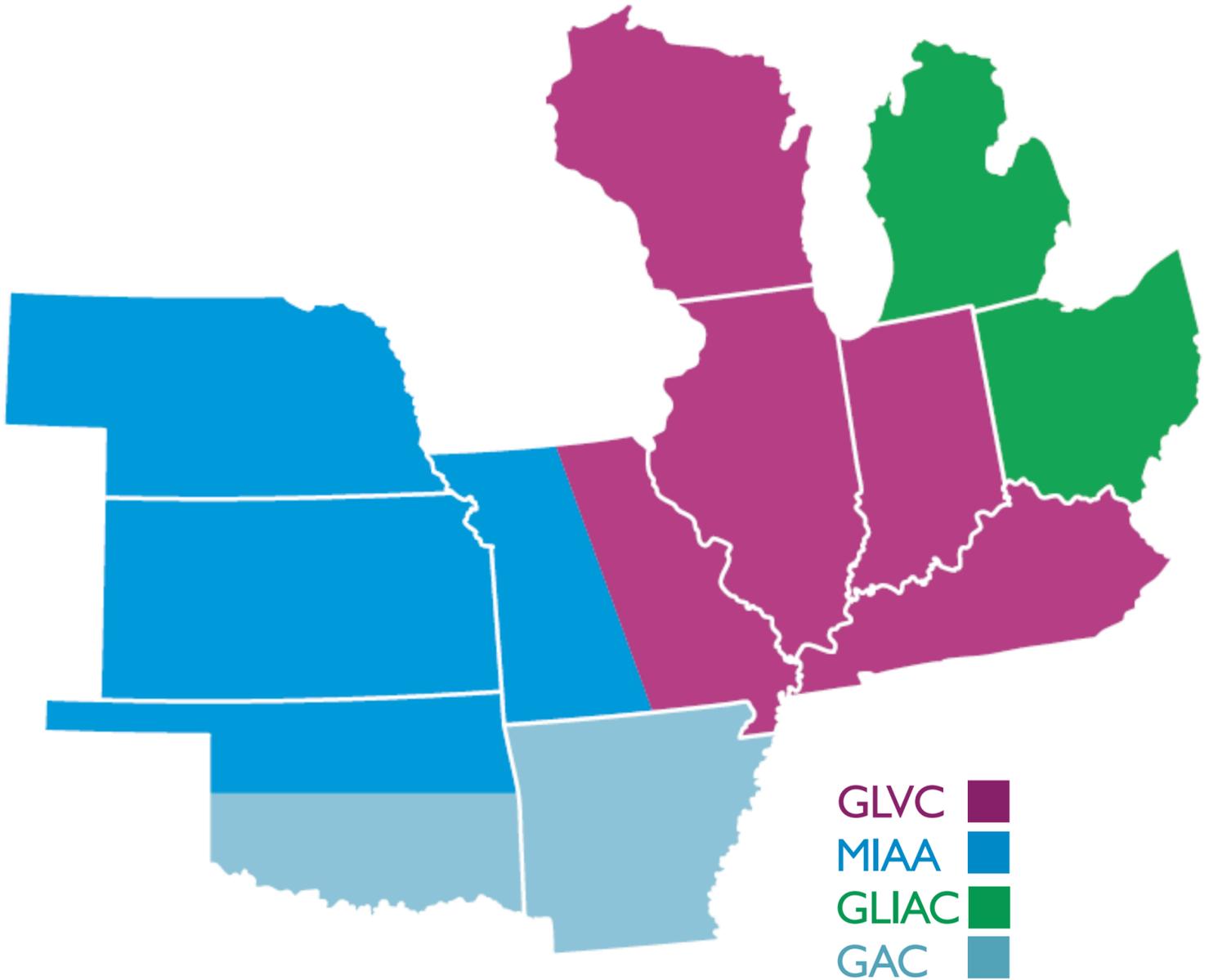
SPORTS

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FOOTBALL FACES REALIGNMENTS

BY RACHEL STEINHOFF
Staff Reporter

The NCAA has approved regional realignment within Div. II. Beginning during September 2017, the realignment model will reorganize football-sponsoring conferences into four super-regions based on geographic location.

Truman State and the rest of the teams in the GLVC are set to transition to super-region four, placing them with familiar teams in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association and Great American Conference.

Truman Athletics Director Jerry Wollmering said this new plan was created because so many teams have shifted to different conferences. Wollmering said this movement required the NCAA to reorganize the super-regions and balance the distribution of teams per region.

"This year, one region hosted over 40 teams, while another only hosted 20-something," Wollmering said. "No matter the size of the region, the same amount of teams from each region would make the playoffs under the current system. They're trying to balance it so that teams in each region would have the same chances of making the playoffs."

In addition to creating a more even chance of receiving an at-large bid, the new regions will offer fiscal benefits for the NCAA, depending on which teams make the playoffs. Wollmering said the goal of the new arrangements will cut costs on travel and rooming for regional participants.

Wollmering said in Truman's region, there is the possibility of major savings in the geographical area.

"When you put the MIAA and GLVC in the same region, there's all 14 of Missouri's Div. II football schools," Wollmering said. "Traveling across state is going to be easy travel compared to us now being in region with Texas' Lone Star Conference. We're now looking at bus trips to super-regional games instead of flights. And that would be the biggest savings — more bus trips, less flights."

Wollmering said being geographically closer to re-

gional schools also would make it easier to schedule regional opponents in non-conference regular season matchups. He said though this is a reasonable idea, Truman probably will not benefit from this perk.

"We'd love to play MIAA or GAC schools in our non-conference [football] schedule, but in these bigger conferences all 11 of their football games are conference games," Wollmering said. "With current scheduling, there's unfortunately no opportunity for us to match up with them [during the] regular season. And that will be our biggest challenge — trying to fill non-conference dates."

Wollmering said Truman currently is matched up with the GLIAC. He said scheduling games even against GLIAC opponents will be more difficult, because six of its teams plan to change conferences during 2016.

GLVC Commissioner Jim Naumovich said the issue of scheduling in-region games will present a challenge for the NCAA selection committee. Naumovich said difficulties might arise when the committee decides which schools to award the three at-large post season bids. Naumovich said this issue makes the installation of automatic qualification of the conference champion more noteworthy for the GLVC.

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Naumovich said he thinks the new alignment will present a positive challenge for the conference, and he has a lot of respect and admiration for the three leagues joining the GLVC in region four.

"Especially talking about the GLIAC and MIAA, and

the number of national championships that have come out of those leagues, it's a pretty daunting task," Naumovich said. "You know, we are the youngest D-II football conference in the country, having sponsored the sport for only four years, but as we set the bar higher we look to be competitive at the national level as well. I think it's a challenge our coaches, student athletes and athletic directors will embrace as we look to further establish ourselves."

Head Football Coach Gregg Nesbitt said he acknowledged Truman's new region would not be easy. Nesbitt said the MIAA brings power to the region, but a lot can change from season to season.

"From a football perspective, the MIAA is kind of like the SEC of Division II college football," Nesbitt said. "We were in that league for 100 years, and I played in that league and coached in that league for 15 years, and it's certainly a step up, but the bottom line is, I don't care whether it's high school playoffs or college — you're going to have to beat someone good in order to be a champion."

Nesbitt said before even thinking about regional competition, his team is striving for its primary task — to win a conference championship. Winning a conference championship would grant a team an automatic berth into the NCAA championship bracket, according to the new NCAA rules.

Nesbitt said if a conference ring wasn't enough, automatic playoff entry would certainly add incentive to winning the league. Despite many changes occurring in the game, he said he expects his program to remain the same. Nesbitt said it all starts with the student athletes the staff brings into the program.

"We've got a good niche when it comes to recruiting," Nesbitt said. "This is a very distinct university. With our size and the type of academic institution we have, there's a very set type of athletes that are attracted to us and that we're attracted to, quite honestly, in recruiting. Going from MIAA to GLVC, there hasn't been any type of change in the quality or type of athlete that we've been recruiting, and I don't expect that to change."



Nikki Sisson

Sophomore Nikki Sisson earned three individual victories at Truman's Tri-Meet at Lewis University Saturday. Sisson placed first in the 50-meter free, 100-meter free and 200-meter free, while contributing to the Bulldogs' record-setting 200-meter free relay.

PLAYER of the WEEK