Welcome to the SEC

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Texas A&M and Missouri officially became new members of the Southeastern Conference on July 1.

Their real induction comes next week when they join 12 other teams, each represented by their head football coaches and three players at the annual SEC Football Media Days in Birmingham.

I was there the day then-SEC Commissioner Roy Kramer welcomed Arkansas and South Carolina to the conference in 1992.

I had known and covered Kramer during his days as Vanderbilt's athletics director. But the day he wore a large plastic Razorback snout on his head, was indeed groundbreaking.

It was totally out of character for Kramer, who was always dignified in his role at Vanderbilt and as the SEC's commissioner.

Kramer was genuinely excited about adding two teams. It gave the SEC 12 teams, the exact number it needed according to NCAA bylaws, to break the conference into two, six-team divisions and have a SEC Championship Game.

Now, I doubt we will see current Commissioner Mike Slive wear a Tiger's head as a sign of acceptance for Missouri. And as the former practicing attorney has no doubt tried, I'm not sure he knows what an Aggie is.

But Slive is no less excited now than Kramer was then.

It signaled a significant step toward moving toward a four-team playoff in 2014 that will produce a national championship game of mammoth proportions.

In 1992, playing an 11-game regular season schedule (eight conference games), plus the SEC Championship Game, I remember writing that going forward, it would be impossible for an SEC team to win eight conference games, win a conference championship game and then win a national championship game.

Well, Alabama ran the table that first year the format was in place. The Crimson Tide won all eight SEC games, won the SEC title game against Florida and completed a spectacular 13-0 season by beating top-ranked Miami (Fla.) in the Sugar Bowl for the national championship.

I never sent then-Alabama Coach Gene Stallings a thank-you note for setting me straight. I learned a valuable lesson. I learned to never say never, much less write it.

Now the SEC enters another era, having won the past six BCS national championships.

It's not as if the SEC left the back door cracked and Texas A&M and Missouri snuck in unnoticed. These are not Little Sisters of the Poor football programs.

Just as Arkansas and South Carolina were forced to upgrade their football programs or risk getting plowed under by SEC competition, A&M and Mizzou will step up to the plate.

It won’t be a quick fix. Arkansas has played in three SEC Championship games, but lost all three. The Hogs have one BCS bowl game since 1992. In the same time, South Carolina has played in one title game, but no BCS bowl games.

A&M and Missouri are two large state schools geographically situated in fertile high school recruiting areas.

Texas A&M is currently ranked No. 4 by Rivals.com and Missouri is No. 25. Watch for them to slide into SEC states to enhance their strong recruiting bases in Texas and Missouri.

Slive has stated the SEC will remain at 14 teams. He also says they will consider adding teams that could strengthen the SEC.

I predict the SEC will eventually become a 16-team league. But then, my 1992 prediction fell apart like a jilted bride at the altar. Take it for what it’s worth.

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