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Big Ten's Delany needs to cut a deal with Comcast, or he'll be sorry

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Somebody needs to pull Jim Delany aside and tell the Big Ten commissioner he sounded like a kook last week.

Yes, a kook.

That sounds harsh, but it's deserved and, obviously, what Delany needs to hear.

Thursday afternoon, the Big Ten commissioner held a media conference call, ostensibly to announce more women's sports programming on the fledgling Big Ten Network.

The real reason, however, immediately became clear when Delany began ranting about Monday's New York Times story that addressed the real possibility that millions of Big Ten fans will be shut out of seeing football games this fall because Delany can't get local cable providers to pick up his new network.

This is a huge issue, one that's only going to loom larger as football season approaches. If Delany can't work out a deal with Comcast, 5.6 million people in the Midwest won't be able to see Big Ten football games they've previously been able to watch on local channels.

And Delany is trying to pressure Comcast to not just carry his channel, but pay him \$1.10 per Midwestern subscriber to do so, which is why he went off on an uninterrupted 15-minute-plus rant Wednesday, ripping a Comcast executive quoted in the Times story as calling the network's programming second- and third-tier.

"Some of those comments quite honestly bothered me, in particular the comments about the Iowa women's volleyball team, and about the second-tier nature of the games, and the narrow interest Comcast might have in our network," Delany said. "Quite honestly, I don't know how those remarks go on the East Coast, but in the Midwest, when you talk about women's sports teams, you talk about them with respect. They're not second-tier.

"Certainly, games at Michigan, Penn State and Ohio State, I don't care who the opponent is, those are not second-tier games."

Quite honestly, Jim? There wasn't a word in the Times story about Iowa women's volleyball.

When Delany was confronted with that fact, he said the comment was made in another publication, but that's not true either. Comcast did say, in a press release, that fans outside Iowa would not pay to watch "University of Iowa volleyball games."

It's a lot less inflammatory comment without the specific shot at women's volleyball, but that didn't stop Delany from demanding an apology.

Seriously. The man demanded an apology for something Comcast officials never said, which - let's be fair - would be the truth even if they did say it.

People aren't interested in Iowa volleyball, women's or otherwise.

Delany needs to face reality: Yes, the bulk of the content on the Big Ten Network absolutely will be second-

and third-tier.

That's because the Big Ten Network is able to only show football and basketball games that haven't been picked up by ABC and ESPN. Michigan's September football games against Oregon and Notre Dame, for instance, never had any chance of showing up on the Big Ten Network. Ditto for any game between two Top 25 teams.

The Big Ten Network will get leftovers.

Here, for example, is the first weekend of college football on the network:

Appalachian State at Michigan.

Youngstown State at Ohio State.

Florida International at Penn State.

Northeastern at Northwestern.

Bowling Green at Minnesota.

Indiana State at Indiana.

Are you kidding? How could you call those games anything BUT third-tier?

When the commissioner of the Big Ten Conference dares to demand an apology from Comcast officials for describing that lineup as second- or third-rate, it's time to question whether Delany has become so arrogant he thinks he isn't just above question, but reality itself.

A game isn't first-tier just because the Michigan football team steps on the field. There's a reason Michigan fans are upset their team is opening up against Appalachian State. There's a reason you'll be able to buy tickets outside the stadium for \$5 and \$10.

It's a bad game.

Look, the Big Ten Network is, at its heart, a great idea. It will allow the conference to cut out the middleman and leverage its football and basketball appeal to make more money off television rights than any other conference in the country. Delany deserves credit for having this bold vision and making it happen.

But, if the largest cable providers in the Midwest aren't carrying his network, if his fans can't see the games, he has failed.

Utterly and totally failed.

It's long past time for Delany to realize that, stop trying to wring every possible penny out of Comcast and Time Warner, stop trying to bully the networks in the media, and cut a deal that ensures Big Ten football fans will see all of the games they're used to seeing.

Because if that doesn't happen, it will be Delany - not Comcast - who owes Big Ten fans and athletes a much-deserved apology.

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