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Gophers snap 23-game skid at Ohio State

Sports

WCHA lifts moratorium on expansion

Unanimous vote will allow other teams to join conference

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MANKATO

Minnesota State University was the last school to join the Western Collegiate Hockey Association, officially gaining entrance into the prestigious conference in 1999.

After that, the league locked its doors.

On Thursday, after a decade, it cracked them open a bit when school representatives

voted unanimously (10-0) to lift the moratorium on expansion.

The decision will allow Bemidji State and possibly others to make a pitch to join the conference.

"The sentiment around the table was not about one team but about the sport,"

Minnesota State athletic director Kevin Buisman said in a



Kevin Buisman

Convention in Washington, D.C., where the vote was held. "We have an obligation as the premier conference in college hockey to be good stewards of the game and have an open and honest discussion about what's best for it."

Faculty representative Ken Anglin cast Minnesota State's vote.

Bemidji State is cur-

rently a member of College Hockey America, which is down to just four teams after other programs departed for different conferences or folded.

A long-time Division II program like Minnesota State, Bemidji State is the only Division I men's hockey program in Minnesota not in the WCHA, although it is in the WCHA women's conference. The city of Bemidji is sitting on plans

to expand. Bemidji State is currently a member of College Hockey America, which is down to just four teams after other programs departed for different conferences or folded.

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WCHA: No guarantees conference will expand

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for a \$65 million ice arena and events center in hopes of housing a WCHA hockey team.

Because of its dwindling conference, Bemidji State does have a scheduling agreement with the WCHA and has 10 games against WCHA teams, including Minnesota State, on this season schedule.

However, there is no guarantee that the WCHA will expand. According to a conference press release,

interested institutions will have until March 31 to apply for membership. Applications will be reviewed during the conference's spring meetings April 26-28 in Marco Island, Fla., and a vote on membership may or may not take place at that time.

After Thursday's vote, Bemidji State quickly issued its own press release announcing its intention to apply for membership.

"A (WCHA) that includes Bemidji State University would be a

tremendous benefit not only to Bemidji State but also to the WCHA," school president Jon Quistgaard said in the release.

Buisman said he didn't know if Bemidji State would be the only school seeking membership.

One addition would make the WCHA an 11-team conference. Alabama-Huntsville is a College Hockey America member, and, recently, WCHA Commissioner Bruce McLeod dismissed rumors of interest from Nebraska-

Omaha, a Central Collegiate Hockey Association member that geographically sits in the middle of WCHA territory.

"We don't know; we'll wait and see if there's other interest," Buisman said. "The moratorium might have stood in the way of others expressing their interest."

While a majority was all that was needed to lift the moratorium, eight of the 10 schools would have to approve the admission of a new team.