The Southwest Rugby Conference has been in the works for months. It's a conceptual DI conference being formed to include several of the Football Bowl Subdivision schools in Texas who are moving up to DI per USA Rugby's College Restructuring Plan, and it's somewhat mimicking the old NCAA Southwest Conference, which disbanded in 1996, with its members fleeing to the Big 12, SEC, WAC and Conference USA.

The SWRC finalized its initial membership Thursday (RUGBYMag.com is expecting a release from the conference in the coming days). Not included in the initial membership is Texas A&M, who sought to enter their developmental side in the SWRC. Another notable program not included is Texas Tech, who competed in the Texas Rugby Union's DI conference this season and was a member of the SWC.

Texas A&M applied to enter the SWRC, but was denied. Texas Tech coach Ronaldo Arroyo said that when he approached a SWRC organizer about the conference, he was told the league had its members and were moving forward with those members.

The omission of Tech and A&M could be the first tangible example of what many people feared when the Restructuring Plan came down from USA, that autonomous conferences could pick and choose who they wanted in their competition and leave schools, like Tech, without a league to play in.

Below is the unedited reaction A&M assistant coach Johnny Smith posted on the team's website and circulated to the media after the Aggies were denied admission. Stay tuned to *RUG BYMag.com*
as this and other college restructuring stories develop.

Texas A&M's application to become a member of the newly formed Division I Southwest Collegiate Rugby Conference has been denied. The conference was formed based on the USA Rugby directive that teams must now align into conferences. The conference includes founding members Baylor, Rice, Sam Houston, Texas State, TCU, University of Houston, and UNT. The University of Texas also filed an application recently and was accepted into the competition. No reason was given for the denial of the Texas A&M application.

"It is a bit disappointing as Texas A&M was a member of the original NCAA Southwest Conference and we feel we could have brought something positive to the Southwest Collegiate Rugby Conference" stated A&M coach Craig Coates. The rationale put forward by the SWCRC for formation of the conference was the following:

1) It gives the winner an automatic bid into the national championship bracket; - No impact as the Texas A&M 2nd side cannot advance due to the involvement of the Texas A&M 1st side in the CPD competition.

2) It creates competition in close proximity that the clubs can manage; - Texas A&M is within ~2hrs drive of 6 of the conference members.

3) It brings together a variety of levels that will hopefully build all up, without too drastic a difference in levels to extinguish those that are currently building; - The Texas A&M 2nd side played 4 of the SWCRC participants in the Fall and while competitive, lost every match.

4) Establishes a core group of name-recognizable institutions to market for sponsorship & recruitment on the collective college campuses. – Texas A&M fits this criteria.

The positives that Texas A&M felt they brought to the conference are:

A. Increased exposure for the conference by including a big name school and well respected rugby program.

B. Additional competitive match within 2 hours drive for conference teams –Baylor, Rice, Sam Houston, University of Houston, & just over 2hrs for Texas State.

C. Continued in state rivalries and traditional match-ups.

D. While Texas A&M remains fully committed to the CPD; if the competition folds, or if future student officers decide they don't want to be part of it anymore, Texas A&M will need a competitive DI conference to play in and wanted be part of the SWCRC to contribute resources, expertise, and support. The current situation leaves Texas A&M isolated and without a competitive conference structure to participate in; which will also apply to proposed future 7's competitions.

"I can only assume the Southwest Conference didn't see it the same way" stated Coates. "Before the league formed we were told that our school was too large (undergraduate population) to compete against the smaller schools like Rice and Baylor. However, UH has an undergrad population of 29,000+, Texas State 27,000+, UNT 27,000+ and the University of Texas 38,000+. Texas A&M has an undergrad enrollment of 36,000+. Apparently school size was not the issue either."

USA Rugby has made it clear that conferences are independent and can decide who is in and who is out, however arbitrary their reasoning may be. "It is their conference and they have the right to choose who they want to be part of it" said Asst. Coach Johnny Smith. "We tried putting together a Big XII Rugby Conference (that failed to materialize) and that would have potentially left out non-Big 12 schools." Texas A&M is now looking to enter their 2nd side into the TRU Division II competition. "Our 1st XV will continue on in the CPD and our 2nd XV will hopefully find a home in the TRU DII competition."