DR. JOHN BARDO, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT: “It is really my pleasure to announce officially – although this is probably the worst-kept secret in North America – that the American Athletic Conference has invited Wichita State to be its 12th basketball-playing member, and at this point, we accept.

We’ll join the conference on July 1st, so we will be competing for championships in that conference in the next academic year. That’s very important, I think, to both us and to the conference that we move quickly, and that we take advantage of the great opportunity we have to be part of one of the best conferences in America. If you look at the schools in the American, they are all either Research I or II, by the way we classify nationally. Wichita State is a Research II, and we are, in terms of funded research according to the National Science Foundation, right in the middle of the conference. So, we fit.

I care deeply about our student-athletes, about their experiences, about what happens to them. I want them to compete for championships. I want them to be on the national stage, because that’s why they do what they do. Joining the American gives us that opportunity. But as important as that is, there are a lot of other elements to this that are hugely important, and reasons to celebrate this day may be a little different than what people have historically thought about athletics.

If you think about our university, we are a rising, major research university. We are now in a conference with other major research universities. As people get to know each other, it opens up opportunities for growth. It opens up opportunities to learn from one another. It opens up opportunities for joint projects that affect the quality of experience for both our faculty and students. And that’s huge, that’s huge. That’s even more important than competing for championships. The other major piece to this that is so critical is [to] think about what it does to [the] greater Wichita [area]. ‘You guys are kind of like Dallas and Houston and Memphis and Cincinnati,’ okay, I’ll take that! That [isn’t] all that bad! Think about when people talk about who you’re with, who are your friends. Well your friends are SMU and Tulsa and East Carolina and Cincinnati and Memphis and Temple, and our great friends up in Connecticut. Think about what that means in terms of the stature of this metropolitan area, and the stature of this institution. And yeah, by the way, we’ll play some pretty good athletic [teams] in there too. One of my goals is that we’ll beat Connecticut’s women’s basketball team.

...So to all of you who have lived through this with us, thank you. For [Director of Athletics] Darron Boatright and the countless hours and sleepless nights that he put through to get this to happen, thank you. To our friends in the Missouri Valley Conference: thank you for so many wonderful years, for the great competition, for being the kind of institutions that care about students [and] that care about quality. To [MVC Commissioner] Doug Elgin and your staff: you’re tremendously professional, and one of the few things I regret about leaving the Missouri Valley [Conference] is that we won’t get to spend time with those wonderful people. But, at the end of the day, we are Wichita State. At the end of the day, we are competing for championships, and at the end of the day, we are a rising national university. Go Shocks!”
DARRON BOATRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS: “Thank you Dr. Bardo. What an exciting day for Wichita State University, for our athletic department, and for our city. I’m very proud to say that since my time sitting in the Director of Athletics’ chair, the President has told me to do one thing, and that was on day one: to get us into the American Athletic Conference. With his vision and leadership of where this institution is going, which includes athletics, I consider him a visionary. I consider him a broad thinker, and I appreciate his ability to allow us to serve in our roles in the capacity that we do, and dream big right along with him. That’s what we’re doing, and I appreciate that vision.

It is mixed emotions today because we spent so much time and so many years happily in the Missouri Valley Conference, but it became evident that the time had come for us to grow and continue to expand our horizons. So we embarked on this journey 15 months ago, and it’s been a labor of love for a lot of us. I appreciate and want to thank publicly my staff...This is the beginning. This is the end of one phase and the beginning of another, and I hope it’s a phase that lasts 75 years as well.

But we’re going to continue to push, we’re going to continue to grow. We’re going to continue to have the same expectations for our athletic department, our teams, our student-athletes and coaches, as we always have. We’re going to serve Wichita and Wichitans proud. We’re going to ask them to continue to grow with us as well. This is a community effort. And yes, that means money, so let’s get that out of the way.

But I look forward to the challenges this creates. I thank my friends in the Missouri Valley Conference and all the member institutions. I’ve developed some fantastic relationships with other administrators, not just athletic directors, but other administrators across the board. I loved my time working with Commissioner Elgin and [Associate Commissioner] Jack Watkins and [Associate Commissioner] Mike Kern. I really enjoyed that, and I really look forward to meeting new folks and working with them, and trying to serve this institution that you all make so great. So thank you, and I look forward to continue working with you.”

PAIGE HUNGATE, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT-ELECT: “There’s always so many exciting things happening on-campus, and this is something new to add to that list. The 60th session of Student Government Association is one that is incredibly dedicated to bringing the campus and community together, and rallying this city behind the university. So I say that this move to the American Athletic Conference falls right in line with that. I’m confident that our city, our region, and our school are going to gain so much more respect for this move, and I’m also confident that our [athletic] team[s] will gain much more respect for the caliber of teams that we’ll be playing. I believe that our community will take much interest in partaking in our athletic successes. I think that, in the end, this will unite our students and our community together in a stronger way. As always, it’s a great day to be a Shocker.”
JEFF LONGWELL, MAYOR OF WICHITA: “Well thank you for letting me be a part of this, it certainly is a great day...How exciting for the city of Wichita, I’ll get into that in a minute. I will tell you that I was visiting my friends at KGSO this morning, and I told them I was coming [to campus] for a different reason. I was told that [Gregg Marshall] had been watching my game mature at the YMCA and that he’d found out I still had a year left of eligibility. Then I find out this news, it’s okay too. Let’s talk about that for a minute.

When we talk about why is it good for us, as we know, this [men’s basketball] program continues to shine. It’s good for the players, it’s good for the college, and it’s good for the city of Wichita, because we’re going to get exposure like we’ve never gotten exposure before. And thanks to this coach – who is the best coach on the planet – we get free exposure from the city of Wichita. How good is that? So thank you President Bardo for your vision. Thank you Darron for doing that one thing right, now we can go on to number two. And Coach Marshall, you’re awesome. Thank you.”

DAVID UNRUH, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS: “Good afternoon everyone. On behalf of the Board of Sedgwick County Commissioners, I want to tell you that we are delighted to celebrate this great announcement with you today...we’re all great supporters of Wichita State University. We think that this is going to be an opportunity, and also present challenges. But we’re convinced that our student-athletes, our academic and research side of the university, are all up to the challenge to leverage this into something that’s really terrific for our entire region. This is a regional decision, because it affects everything in south-central Kansas, and in this part of our country. So we’re pleased to be here, pleased to congratulate Dr. Bardo and Darron Boatright for the great work you’ve done in making this happen. Sedgwick county is proud of our partnership with Wichita State University, and we look forward to moving forward, and enjoying lots of wins and lots of successes. We are with you all the way, go Shocks!”

DR. BARDO ON...

...The potential to add football now that WSU has changed conferences.
“...We have to digest now...For us, this is a major change. We are not going to talk about football for a while. [It] doesn’t mean it’s dead, but it means that right now, if you recall six months to a year ago, I said we really have to separate the two questions. Let’s get [conference realignment] settled first, and then we’ll go back and talk about [football]. Well the settlement on this is better than I had hoped. This is as big of a deal as we could’ve possibly had, and so now it’s time to focus on it. Make sure our teams are competitive, make sure that we know how to get to all the schools, that’s not as easy as it sounds. Make sure that we are doing things the way the American intends. People talk about the P[ower] Five [conferences] and the P[ower] Six, the American is the P6. This is one of the really big conferences in America. My excitement and interest right now is let’s do this right - and then let’s come back and talk about other things later – but let’s do this right. Let’s do this well so that [the AAC] are proud that
they took us in, that we’re proud of what we’re doing, and I want to see that we win all the championships. Then we’ll go talk about other things.”

DARRON BOATRIGHT ON...

...If he expects the move to assist postseason seeding for men’s basketball.
“This had nothing to do with it whatsoever. I think that speaking as a university and department is most important. But when you talk about our men’s basketball program, it deserved this. It had nothing to do with seeding. This started the year after we were a number one seed. Hopefully this will alleviate the pressure that [Marshall] has to go through...but as far as if this had to do with seeding, it did not. It had nothing to do with it.

JEFF LONGWELL ON...

...How this conference move elevates Wichita on a national scale.
“The easy part of that equation is when we have a successful [men’s basketball] program that makes their way deep into the [NCAA] Tournament, Wichita obviously is elevated in markets that we’ve never been able to reach before. And so it introduces our city [and] our college to new people that may not have had the chance to be introduced to our great city and our great university, but more importantly, it elevates our players so that more eyes on them...And there’s lots of more opportunities both in where they go next, and secondly where we see new kids that get a chance to have eyes on our program. I’m not going to speak for coach [Marshall], although I try to at times on my Monday morning quarterbacking.”

DAVID UNRUH ON...

...How this conference move elevates Wichita on a national scale.
“I think that...it’s clear that this sort of exposure changes our image to the rest of the United States. If we talk in terms of economic development - and we talk about what’s happening along the I-35 corridor that Dr. Bardo talks about a lot of times - being visible, being exposed, and showing the talents and resources we have, will make a big difference in decisions by companies as they make decisions about economic development. I think this is a real positive step for us.”

MEN’S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH GREGG MARSHALL ON...

...The excitement of playing the new conference members, and hosting them at Charles Koch Arena.
“Well I think it’ll be very exciting for the fans. It’ll be gut-wrenching for the coaches. You’re talking about programs that have won national championships, multiple national championships, like UCONN and Cincinnati, I hope I’m not leaving out anyone. And then the coaches, like Tubby Smith at Memphis, who has won a national championship [with Kentucky in 1998]. You’re going to be playing against NBA guys; bigger, more athletic guys than we’ve been seeing on a regular basis in the Valley. We’ll have to step up our game. The entertainment value
should be through the roof, and we’re bringing in some of the finest athletic teams in the country, some of the finest academic institutions in the country. That’s who we’re rubbing shoulders with. Our work is cut out for us to continue doing what we’ve been doing, and that’s winning with integrity and doing it in a first-class way, and hopefully continuing to get into the NCAA Tournament and advance with special young people.”

...How the move to the AAC will assist with recruiting.
“Well we mentioned the cities that we’ll be travelling to, and the markets we’ll be in now. We’re talking about all the way down in Houston and Dallas and Tulsa up along I-35. We’ll head east to Memphis and Cincinnati and Tulane. Then you’ve got the two schools in Florida [Central Florida and South Florida] and the two schools in the northeast [UCONN and Temple], as well as East Carolina. I just think that those markets are ones that we can now tap into a little more, and promise the young people that we’re recruiting that not only will they get a degree, but that they’ll win and get a chance to display their talents in the NCAA Tournament, and they’ll have an opportunity to play at home.”

...The team’s reaction.
“We haven’t really gotten into it with them...I’m excited that it’s come to fruition...Our players want to play. As you can tell, when we get an opportunity to play good teams that are the best in the country, they rise to the occasion. They want to play the best, they want to compete against the best, because they ultimately want to be the best. So this will be a welcome change for us.”