

UH belongs in a top BCS conference

By **RENU KHATOR**

UH fans have been calling, writing and e-mailing me with nonstop requests and demands that I position the University of Houston for inclusion in a major BCS conference. The passion and enthusiasm of our fans are impressive and gratifying, and bring to the forefront the long and storied history of athletics excellence at the University of Houston, dating back to a legacy of success we achieved in the former Southwest Conference.

Though we are proud members of Conference USA, the changing landscape of collegiate athletics across the nation has created opportunities, and we are moving aggressively and proactively to explore all options that would enhance the University of Houston's opportunities and Tier One aspirations.

We are not taking a "wait-and-see" approach but instead are poised for big success. Our case for being included in discussions about major conference realignment is strong, both in academics and athletics, and we are lining up supporters for the University of Houston, not just locally, but in Austin and beyond.

The University of Houston, as the state's third-largest public university, deserves to be in a major BCS conference. UH brings the 10th-largest television market in the nation, and a strong alumni base that could add up to a million new TV viewers to a conference. With a strong performance in academics and research, the university is well on its way to becoming a Tier One research institution and is worthy of a top-tier athletics conference.

According to the report, Top American Research Universities, the University of Houston is at par or better than seven universities in the Big 12 in measures such as the number of National Academy members, degrees awarded, total enrollment and academic performance measures.

We are attracting and producing top scientists, engineers and scholars — thereby improving the quality of life while significantly increasing external research dollars brought in to the Texas economy. UH is home to many nationally ranked programs, including the Law Center, Health Law, Intellectual Property Law, Chemical Engineering, Social Work, Entrepreneurship, Health and Human Performance, Creative Writing, Clinical Psychology, Kinesiology, Hotel & Restaurant Management, and many others.

There are more than 3,500 UH alumni who serve as president/CEO of their companies, including PricewaterhouseCoopers Chairman and Global CEO Samuel DiPiazza, Delta Air Lines CEO Richard Anderson, Neiman Marcus CEO Karen Katz, Centerpoint Energy president and CEO David McClanahan, Brinker International CEO Douglas Brooks, Dynegy Chairman and CEO Bruce Williamson and many more.

Since arriving in Houston almost two and a half years ago, I have been consistent in sharing the message that building the strongest athletics program possible is a key element of a Tier One university. I remain more committed than ever to that pledge.

The University of Houston has much to offer. We are located in the fourth-largest city in the nation, and we are home to 25 companies on the 2010 Fortune 500 list. Last season, UH football reached the rank of No. 12 in the nation. Preseason polls rank UH football in the Top 25, with three preseason All-Americans including Heisman Trophy candidate Case Keenum, and seven nationally televised games with an aggressive schedule that includes non-conference matchups with UCLA, Mississippi State and Texas Tech.

UH promises cutting-edge facilities for its athletics programs, with plans for a new \$100 million-plus football stadium on campus. The new stadium will have 40,000 seats, with the option to expand to 50,000-plus. The university is negotiating options to play at Reliant Stadium during construction. Plans also include a \$40 million renovation to the basketball arena.

The University of Houston has produced some of the finest athletes in the nation, including 660 All-America Award winners and 65 Olympians earning 39 medals. Recently, alum Brad Lincoln made his Major League Baseball pitching debut for the Pittsburgh Pirates and Kevin Kolb is expected to start at quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles in the upcoming NFL season. Notable UH athletes include Heisman winner Andre Ware, NBA stars Clyde Drexler and Hakeem Olajuwon, Olympian Carl Lewis, golfers Fred Couples, Steve Elkington and Fuzzy Zoeller and Major League Baseball players Doug Drabek, Tom Paciorek, Ryan Wagner and Woody Williams.

The University of Houston, this city's hometown university, has a strong alumni base of nearly 217,000 living and working in the area. With UH in a major athletic conference, Houston will have a nationally competitive college athletic program to bring national exposure to the city. The University of Houston cannot succeed unless the community becomes our partner in this historic journey. Now is the time to step forward and show your pride in your hometown university. The University of Houston *must* be in a major BCS conference - that's what is best for Houston and best for Texas!

Khator is the president of the University of Houston and chancellor of the UH System.