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cu basketball

Car accident changed Buffs basketball coach Tad Boyle's destiny

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Tad Boyle is the 18th men's basketball coach at CU after four years at UNC, when the Bears went from 4-24 to 25-8. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

survived a horrific car accident 16 years ago because "I'm so hard-headed." But, frankly, the new Colorado men's basketball coach remembers little about the collision.

"Except the part about waking up in a hospital bed," he said.

Then in his eighth year as a Boulder-based stockbroker, Boyle was heading to work one morning when somebody ran a red light and plowed into his vehicle at the intersection of McCaslin Boulevard and South Boulder Road in Louisville. The collision crushed the front of Boyle's car.

He was knocked unconscious, but the air bag likely saved his life.

"I tell people to remember that I once had a head injury, and if I forget to call a timeout I have an excuse," Boyle said with a chuckle. "But really, that accident got me thinking. If my car had been a few feet farther into that intersection, I wouldn't be around today."

BOULDER — Tad Boyle jokes now that he

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"With an experience like that, you start to realize it could be over in an instant. That was life-changing for me. I decided then I'd better pursue my passion. I decided I wanted to be a college basketball coach."

Boyle, 47 and a native of Greeley, was introduced as CU coach last week, after four seasons at Northern Colorado. He credits his fast-track coaching career to hard work, good breaks, talented players and, yes, that car accident 16 years ago, just miles from the Boulder campus.

"I really believe if it hadn't been for that accident, all this wouldn't have happened," he said as he settled into his new office.

At that point, Boyle was earning six figures as a stockbroker and considered his "other" job, as head coach at Longmont High, to be little more than a hobby. Later that year, Boyle received a phone call from his former University of Kansas teammate, Mark Turgeon, the current Texas A&M coach, then an assistant at Oregon.

"Mark said the good news is, there is an opening on their staff. And the bad news



Tad Boyle, the new men's basketball coach at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post (THE DENVER POST | Kathryn Scott Osler)

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is, it's a restricted-earnings position that the NCAA had in those days, and it paid \$16,000 a year," Boyle recalled. "It's a good thing I wasn't married at the time and had put some money away. It was a leap of faith."

Boyle called his branch manager, Butch Carlson, who still holds that position at what is now called RBS Wealth Management, located just off Boulder's Pearl Street Mall.

"Tad was doing great with us," Carlson said. "When he told me he was going to follow his passion, I wasn't surprised. I was happy for him. Tad is highly competitive. He works hard. He wants to be at the top."

"That's great in the business world, and it's perfect for coaching."

Hoops wars in the driveway

Folks in Greeley learned of Boyle's prowess as a basketball player long before he earned Converse All-America honors at Greeley Central in 1981.

Boyle was 12 when his older brother, Hugh, would take him to the Northern Colorado campus for pick-up games. The competition often included UNC players, as well as the area's high school stars.

"I'll tell you what, Tad had no problem holding his own," said David Freemyer, who would later become a prep teammate of Boyle's. "Tad

understood the game. He would draw the defenders toward him and then pass the ball to somebody for an open shot. He was a smart player even then."

Hugh Boyle, five years Tad's senior, was a talented player himself at Greeley Central and later at the South Dakota School of Mines. Their sibling rivalry, both believe, accelerated Tad's basketball development. Their basketball battles began at a young age when a cottage cheese container taped to the bedroom door would serve as the basket. The small plastic ball did not bounce well, so dribbling became optional.

"Tad still kids me that I never let him win," Hugh said. "When we were a little older, we'd play one-on-one in the driveway. After Tad lost, he'd grab and shake me to get out all his frustrations. Then he'd say, 'Let's do it again.'"

Boyle's coach at Greeley Central, Larry Hicks, recalled looking up from his desk one day and seeing Kentucky coach Joe B. Hall standing in his office. The top recruiters in college ball began making the trek to Greeley during Boyle's junior season. The 6-foot-4 guard was averaging almost 29 points per game in the days before 3-pointers.

Hicks, now retired and still residing in Greeley, said he had a special mailbox put in his office to hold all the recruiting material Boyle received. At home, Boyle had to place a restriction on answering phone calls because they got in the way of his homework.

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To his credit, Boyle never let all the attention get to his head.

"Tad didn't look at himself as being special," said Hicks, whose team won the 1981 Class 3A state title in Boulder. "I always tell people around here that one of the greatest assets Tad had was he allowed me to coach him.

"When you have a really good player, as a coach you can end up walking on pins and needles. Sometimes with (a blue-chipper), if you bark at them you can have problems. Tad was never like that."

Learning under a legend

Boyle signed with Kansas and played two seasons for coach Ted Owens and two under Larry Brown. Other than being named team captain by Brown for the 1984-85 season as a senior, Boyle had a pedestrian college career, averaging around 19 minutes per game.

Lacking the athleticism of others on the roster, Boyle started just 24 games and never averaged more than 3.1 points per game.

Current Kansas coach Bill Self played guard at Oklahoma State during the four years Boyle was at Kansas and still chuckles about their matchups.

"Tad and I looked forward to playing against each other because we knew that was at least

one guy in the league we were quick enough to guard," Self said.

Boyle won't deny he became frustrated with his lack of playing time.

"But you know what? I wouldn't be where I am today without going through that experience," he said. "There's no question it made me a better coach. I feel for kids that might get frustrated like I was. And it made me tougher. It made me persevere."

Boyle certainly harbors no hard feelings toward Brown, whom he considers his mentor.

"Coach (Brown) showed me that you have to create a culture where everybody puts the team first," Boyle said. "Danny Manning was a special player. But Coach Brown did not treat Tad Boyle any differently than he did Danny Manning."

Like Brown, Boyle can get loud and demonstrative during practices. "He'll definitely get on you," UNC guard Devon Beitzel said.

But Boyle also puts his arms around players more often than most coaches. "When guys are down, I know what it's like," he said.

Thomas Boyle, Tad's father and an English professor at UNC, died of a heart attack at age 51 while playing racquetball. It was Boyle's senior year at Greeley Central. Tad played the next game, believing that's what his father would have wanted.

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Gym rats wanted

Boyle promises his Colorado teams will play an uptempo style to take advantage of playing at altitude, hoping to, well, run opponents into the ground.

"It will be an exciting brand of basketball, one that players enjoy playing and fans enjoy watching," he said. "I want to score in the 70s and 80s, not the 50s.

"And I promise you we're going to play hard. We're going to tear the nails out of the floor."

His style of play is like a hybrid of Michigan State's Tom Izzo (emphasis on defense and rebounding), Bob Knight (reading the defender as in Knight's motion offense) and Larry Brown (freedom at the offensive end).

"The offense takes what the defense gives you," Beitzel explained. "No matter what the defense does, there is a counter for it."

No matter which system is used, the key for any coach is recruiting top-flight talent, which has been a problem at Colorado. Boyle believes he is good at it and knows what to look for.

"Beyond the physical talent, to compete at this level, a player must have three things: high character, work ethic and a love for the game," Boyle said in describing his recruiting philosophy. To investigate whether a recruit is worthy, Boyle

has a clever litmus test. He makes initial recruiting calls during mid-evening. He views it as a bad sign if the prospect is always available.

"If they're sitting at home playing video games every night you call, you have to wonder about their commitment," Boyle said. "If a parent says, 'He's at the gym and will be back at 9,' that's a good sign."

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Boyle family's high-five

CU men's basketball coach Tad Boyle is married to the former Ann Schell of Greeley. They have two sons, Jack and Pete, and a daughter, Claire. Following are five things Boyle loves to do with his family: 1. Spend time relaxing on a Saturday afternoon, playing catch in the backyard.

2. Go to a cabin near Estes Park for a week.

3. Go bowling.

4. Movie nights at home, with a bowl of popcorn.

5. Taking my wife to dinner, a "date night" thing that we don't seem to have time for enough. A coaching friend of mine has a pillow that says, "We interrupt this marriage for basketball season."

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APRIL 24, 2010, 8:22 AM

CU's Boyle may not use all three scholarships

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

Newly hired Colorado men's basketball coach Tad Boyle told me that CU is still involved with some recruits "but I'm not going to just sign guys to sign guys," he said. "They've got to be the right players, guys that can help us."

Colorado has three scholarships to offer during the spring signing period. Boyle said he hopes to sign a least one frontcourt player with rebounding and defensive skills.

Unused scholarships can be "banked" for the 2010-11 recruiting cycle, which will include the usual early signing period in November.

CU coach Jeff Bzdelik did not sign any players last November, leaving Boyle to scramble this spring.

"There are some guys still out there," Boyle said. "But nationally this is not a strong (recruiting) class for 'biggs' anyway. And a majority of the good ones signed early."

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All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

APRIL 24, 2010, 8:07 AM

CU's Knutson: Everybody coming back

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

I spoke with Colorado guard Levi Knutson and he expects that everybody on the Buffs squad will return next season.

It's common for player transfers to follow coaching changes, but Knutson, a senior-to-be, said every player has already met individually with Tad Boyle and all look forward to playing for the new head coach.

"I think everybody is excited," Knutson said. "I think guys relate to him really well."

After four seasons at Northern Colorado, Boyle was introduced as Jeff Bzdelik's replacement on Monday. A native of Greeley, Boyle said during his introductory news conference that his first order of business was to make sure the current players remained on board.

Star guard Alec Burks, the reigning Big 12 Conference freshman of the year, announced on Wednesday — following a visit by Boyle with the Burks family in Grandview, Mo. — that he will return.

Knutson said everybody else also will be back.

"It's going to be fun," Knutson said. "We're going to run a little bit more and score the ball."

Boyle said forward Casey Crawford will not be reinstated to the roster. After meeting with Bzdelik last month, Crawford announced that he was done with basketball. Crawford has one season of eligibility remaining but will graduate in May.

Colorado went 15-16 this past season, including 6-10 in the Big 12 regular season. The conference record marked an improvement of five victories from the previous year. After three straight years of being seeded No. 12 (last) in the Big 12 Tournament, Colorado earned a No. 8 seed this season.

Crawford (4.6 points per game in 2009-10) and departed senior guard Dwight Thorne (7.5) are the only players who definitely will not be back.

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