



Athletic Director Mike Bohn is most proud of his department "doing it the right way."
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



04/28/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Five Years In, Bohn Reflects, Looks Forward

BOULDER - Mike Bohn and his son, Brandon, were awaiting dinner recently when another diner approached their table and asked Mike if he was the University of Colorado's athletic director.

Conversations that begin like this usually take one of several routes. Bohn has traveled most of them, and he doesn't dodge the road hazards. By choice, he's made himself highly visible in the Boulder community; in fact, of only five athletic directors in CU history, Bohn might be the most visible and approachable.

So he's accustomed to unscheduled interruptions during the dinner hour, this one by a middle-aged woman who wanted to talk Buffs men's basketball and what led to the reasons she and her husband relinquished their season tickets.

Long story shortened, "The games," she said, "weren't very much fun . . . and we want to win."

To which Bohn responded, "Well, we were 13-3 at home this season . . . how many games did you see?"

"One."

"Which one?"

"Kansas."

Bohn was puzzled. On Feb. 3 in the Coors Events Center before an exuberant capacity crowd - it was one of the few in recent seasons not overrun by KU fans - the Buffs took the top-ranked Jayhawks to overtime before losing, 72-66. Bohn believed the building's atmosphere that night was as electric as he'd seen, enhanced by the spirit squad, the dance team, the pep band, Chip the mascot and, of course, the basketball team's effort.

Was he missing something? In the opinion of one *former* season-ticket holder, yes - and Bohn clearly was bothered.

"Her expectations did not connect with where we were and that's why we don't have them anymore as supporters," he said later. "That frustrates me because I believe we're doing the right things to make it more exciting to come . . . We get it, we're working hard on it. We're trying desperately to pull it together. More importantly, our competitiveness will improve with a consistent, involved fan base; it drives all the key pieces of any successful athletic program, recruiting and intensity of interest.

"How we balance expectations with where we are is really interesting. Everybody wants to win; I want to win, too. Things are not going to change as quickly when people say, 'Well, we'll come when you're really good.' We make progress, but we also seem to take steps back from time to time, and that's where it becomes so challenging to sustain our momentum.

"I've got to be better at informing people about how important they are to our process of building our athletic program and how they can enjoy being involved in the transformation and improvement of the entire enterprise. But we're up to the challenge and we're extremely proud of the people that are helping us."

Pay attention to what he says about winning and the end-of-the-day scoreboard message. Make no mistake, he's mindful of results. But while the W's haven't been racked up as readily as anyone wants in the revenue-producing sports, Bohn believes the groundwork for success is in place. What's more, he says he finds solace in the fact that corners haven't been cut by his coaches and his department as a whole "is doing it the right way."

A large part of his current message for the CU community centers on unity and what can be accomplished by remaining indivisible through trying times - economic or otherwise.

April marks Bohn's fifth year of managing CU athletics, and his anniversary month has been as eventful as the Colorado spring weather. Ground has been broken on a \$10.8 million basketball/volleyball practice facility that will flank the Events Center. All of the coaches who will utilize the building are new - two of them hired this month in men's (Tad Boyle) and women's hoops (Linda Lappe) and volleyball coach Liz Kritza brought aboard in February 2009.

CUBuffs.com recently caught up with Bohn in his office and posed 10 questions about his five years on the job and what lies ahead:

CUBuffs.com: Have these five years flown by? They say time flies when you're having fun . . . are you?

Mike Bohn: "No question about it, I love my role at CU and my profession. But it would be inaccurate to insinuate that it's all fun. It's hard work and extremely challenging. I become more passionate and encouraged every day. The university, my home state of Colorado and my position - I have tremendous respect and affection for those. I have very high expectations of myself and my staff, our coaches and the university to improve not only the perception of our program by some, but to establish a more competitive program from top to bottom."

CUBuffs.com: What are you most proud of after five years? Would the new basketball/volleyball practice facility be high on your list?

MB: "I believe the one thing I'm most proud of is the way we run our operation. I think back to the (CU) accreditation process, when a student-athlete was serving on the committee. When the accreditation team was on campus, they asked this student-athlete how things are going and to offer an overview of the athletic department. I had no idea of what she was going to say, but she talked about how our administration and our department are committed to doing it right and being committed to full transparency . . .

"To me, that was a pretty powerful statement, and it wasn't one that we could control or even knew was going to be asked. She could have said anything. That meant a lot to me.

"Related to that, we (the athletic department) want to be able to interact with faculty members, key leadership on campus, and build a similar confidence with them. I'm a firm believer that trying to be everything to everybody is a formula for failure. But we have made progress with the unity effort.

"To the normal fan, that might be, 'What the heck is he talking about?' But I believe one of our biggest remaining challenges is a unified push as a program - one that involves the academic leadership on campus, our faculty, fan base, alumni, boosters, donors, media, the community at large. While we might not understand or like certain issues, we're all pushing for the same thing.

"Are we there yet? No. But we certainly aspire to be. I know how special we are when we're united; I think we've had experiences in that. That remains a priority to me.

"Another of the things I'm most proud of is the 2008 (Big 12) men's track and field championships that we were fortunate enough to host. I'm proud of it for many reasons - first that we had a head coach that inspired me to want to host the championship. He then inspired other staffers and donors and student athletes to join that cause and they pulled off something that hadn't been accomplished in 61 years.

"I'm proud of how our fans have united and created over a five-year time period almost a 50,000 people per game environment at Folsom Field. I think that's why the indivisible message I'm trying to lead is so important - it helps us recruit, raise money, helps us with television, with the competitiveness of our team, with the overall 'esprit de corps' of our fans. It is imperative to sustain our game day environment as we don't want to go backwards in any of those efforts.

"I'm proud of our youth initiatives across the state with Ralphie's Roundup, Chauncey's Kids Roundup. Those collectively are the ones that I am personally attached to and come to mind as cornerstone activities. And the partnership that helped us develop the (Buffalo) Stampede on Friday nights of home football games in downtown Boulder, which is entering its sixth season and does not seem possible.

"Why were any of those efforts successful? Because of people coming together, pushing and making it go. I'll never ever forget courageous people like Molly Winter or Jay Elowski for helping make it happen. But then other people got on board and it was contagious. I think that's the neat thing about that event - everybody's excited about it. There's so many winners in collaborative efforts like this.

"I'm very excited about the 40 percent increase in men's basketball attendance this year (and) the commitment we've made to the men's and women's programs with the improvements there. But those aren't Mike Bohn initiatives; those are collective team work initiatives and we are most appreciative of all who help behind the scenes.

"That's why I believe our biggest opportunity and also our most significant challenge is to distinguish ourselves as indivisible. I'm mindful of the Pledge of Allegiance and by no means am being disrespectful . . . but we as a university community must also be indivisible - win, lose or draw - long term we're going to win in all facets of the enterprise. And we're going to have a program that represents our institution, community and state with distinction and promise, one that we can all be proud of.

"I'm proud of the competitive resolve of so many; we must infect more with that collective resolve that helped us win the Big 12 track and field championship on the men's side. That's really a powerful example. People recognize how the scoreboard reads and we're certainly mindful of that. But we believe we're putting in place very important foundation pieces that will serve us long term."

CUBuffs.com: What would you tell those people who are very, very mindful of how the scoreboard reads and want those results to become apparent right now? Those who say, please, let's not wait any longer for the W's?

MB: "We certainly are not a win-at-all-cost program. By that I mean that we're not going to cut corners on our academic requirements or the social responsibility of our student-athletes and staff. We're not going to break NCAA rules . . . we're going to do all the things that are right despite the fact that some constituents don't care about those aspects of

how we run a program.

"That's the directive I've been given by the Board of Regents and my bosses, the chancellor and the president of the university. I embrace those. It's one of the reasons I wanted to be here and why I remain steadfast in our work toward meeting the high expectations that are here."

CUBuffs.com: How pivotal is 2010 for Dan Hawkins and the football program?

MB: "I believe that every season and each game is pivotal for us, for the reasons we've been talking about - perceptions, recruiting, fan base, fan interest, media interest, respect in a very competitive conference. I'd like to believe every football game we play is a significant event here.

"And again, when have we been best in home football games? When we have a great environment and we come out with a focused effort - then some good things happen. I'm mindful of (previous wins against) Oklahoma, West Virginia, the Texas A&M and Kansas games last season.

"That's why sustaining that interest and indivisible presentation is so important. The kids are inspired by it, the coaches are inspired by it . . . that's why I'd like the people who follow our program to understand that (all games) are important."

CUBuffs.com: Once the basketball/volleyball practice facility is up, what's next on the facilities front?

MB: "We have some additional locker room improvements we need to keep working on for a couple of our teams, but the majority of the focus will be in football. The video boards (at Folsom Field) are 11 years old with a life expectancy of 10 (years). Obviously, we're teetering on defectiveness. We have a 40-year-old Flatirons Club that needs attention quickly. Balch Fieldhouse needs upgrades. Fan amenities like restrooms require attention. The football field is without practice lights. We have no shortages of places to make investments, but that's where the majority of the effort will be - around the football enterprise."

CUBuffs.com: The Buff Club Cabinet you helped form . . . is there anything else out there of that creative ilk that's unique to CU and in the works?

MB: "The Buff Club Cabinet was a huge shot in the arm and provided much of the resources to help us move some exciting initiatives forward. That's the support that makes a difference for us. I'm very proud of those members . . . we're hovering just around 57. At one time we were up to 68. We understand the economy and what enters into that, but we'd like to get that (membership) to 100. We remain committed to helping put that together.

"Our scholarship donors are up around 110; it would really be great to get those donors to where we have a scholarship donor at the \$9,000 or \$10,000 level annually for every student-athlete that we have on a scholarship. That would be ideal. We're working hard on trying to expand that as well. Clearly, those are relationship-driven initiatives and we've got to be better - and I'm committed to being better at that. But again, that's where our fans and active stakeholders can play an active role by helping inspire others to want to be a part of it."

CUBuffs.com: We're not hearing as much expansion talk out of the Pac-10 Conference now as we did a couple of months ago. Is the talk simmering just under the surface or has it cooled considerably?

MB: "It does appear to be pretty quiet. As I like to say, it's like crickets out there. But we're certainly active in monitoring the marketplace and understand the importance of ensuring that (CU) is in a league that allows us to continue to grow . . . We're a proud member of the Big 12 Conference and excited about what we continue to do there. We recognize the competitive nature of the league and we're excited to be with it."

CUBuffs.com: Most of the recent expansion talk seems to be centered now on the Big Ten. If that conference goes to as many as 16 teams, do you foresee the college landscape being dramatically altered?

MB: "Anytime you have movement surrounding BCS institutions, it creates unrest among the entire group. I am convinced that the commissioner of the Big 12 Conference, Dan Beebe, is poised to ensure our league is positioned to

address opportunities that may develop. Bowl agreements, television contracts, number of conference games played and financial stability will all play an integral role in any final decisions."

CUBuffs.com: You've said on numerous occasions that CU is at the low end of salaries administratively and for its coaches in the Big 12. Is that a really big barrier for you having the kind of success that you envision here?

MB: "I'd say yes and no. First of all, the staff that is here is here for all the right reasons. And I believe they understand the real value to live in the happiest and healthiest community in the country. To look at those Flatirons and those mountains every day is really, really special.

"However, trying to attract the best of the best, whether you're trying to bring someone into our award-winning physics department, to our illustrious engineering program, to our top ten psychology department, or our outstanding law school, or any of our other highly acclaimed areas - our No. 1 research institution associated with NASA - obviously those resources enter into that. Which is why I go back to having an indivisible, dedicated, high-intensity interest from our fan base - that can differentiate us from others.

"You can tell coaches and recruits that, hey, we might not have everything that some do, but you know what? We have a lot that others will never have. It's a balancing act. But that's a challenge that I have to overcome, to generate more revenue to be able to make the strategic investments to keep the coaches and staff members that we desperately don't want to leave. And in the event we're recruiting coaches, we want to have the resources to be competitive. So it's a balancing act. I believe that we're making progress on that front, but we certainly aren't there yet."

CUBuffs.com: Project into the next five years and tell me where you want things to be and what do you want to see accomplished?

MB: "It would be ideal if the intensity of interest and the product of our football enterprise allow us to sustain or maybe exceed an historical number of season-ticket holders and to create an environment that is inspirational to others and recruits, to coaches and to national TV.

"In five years, it would be really special if we can scratch into the NCAA Tournament in basketball, whether it's one or both teams or alternating teams, whatever. It would be great to be able to sustain the attendance and the intensity of interest of our fan base in basketball. That would be tremendous.

"What I'm trying to say is, let's not go backwards on any initiative. Let's keep pushing on facilities, let's keep pushing on our environment, on the growth of our entire enterprise, the partnership with campus. Let's keep a keen eye on the goal we have, and that's to produce an athletic program that all Buffs - whether you're a faculty member, an alum, an existing student or a future student who can say that's a cool place, I want to go to school there, I want to be a student-athlete there. That's a broad assessment, but be mindful of the fact that we want people to say, "They're doing it the right way and we're proud to be a Buff.'"

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CU looks like good match for Pac-10 on, off field

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

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CU's black-and-gold Folsom Field could be part of the Pac-10 some day. (THE DENVER POST | ANDY CROSS)

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen! I'm Brent Musburger, and you're looking LIVE at Folsom Field in Boulder, where we bring you the 2015 Pac-10 championship game!"

Sounds far-fetched, right? Which part? That Musburger will still be announcing college football games in 2015? Or that Colorado could be playing for a conference title?

If you picked the third option — the conference championship game in the Pac-10 — you might be wrong. As the Pac-10's new, ambitious brain trust assesses its future — and expansion — Colorado appears firmly in its cross hairs.

New commissioner Larry Scott will not comment on specific schools he is targeting, but listen to his criteria for adding schools and he describes Colorado nearly to the Buffs' football helmet design.

"Looking at it from a business perspective, first and foremost, what's going to add value: TV, a football championship game," Scott said in a phone interview. "But there does need to be compatibility to our conference, and of paramount importance is academic compatibility. But there are other important issues such as athletic compatibility and geographic compatibility when you look at costs.

"This isn't just football."

The feeling appears mutual in Boulder. CU chancellor Phil DiStefano points to his school being in the same Association of American Universities with UCLA, California, Southern California and Washington. CU faculty also has more joint research projects with Pac-10 schools than its does with Big 12 schools.

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And Colorado's biggest out-of-state alumni base is in California.

"The academics factor is absolute important to us," said Di-Stefano, who added he has not talked to anyone from the Pac-10 but has done some research. "There are very good schools in the Big 12. There's no doubt about it. But when the faculty looks at the Pac-10, they see places where our faculty and their faculty do interact and where we compete for

Blog: All Things Buffs



The Post's Tom Kensler posts analysis, notes and minutiae on this blog devoted to CU athletics.

students, both undergraduate and graduate."

At the recent Bowl Championship Series meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz., the Pac-10 took a back seat as the Big Ten and Southeastern conferences talked about possible expansion. Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany suggested his conference may add more than one team, and the SEC's Mike Slive said he might be just as proactive.

"I won't sit back and ignore what's going on around me," Slive told reporters in Scottsdale.

To keep up with the changing college landscape, the Pac-10 hired Scott away from the Women's Tennis Association last July. As CEO, Scott signed the largest TV contract in the history of women's tennis and a record \$88 million sponsorship deal with Sony Ericsson.

The staff he assembled seems structured to take the Pac-10 where it has never gone before: deputy commissioner Kevin Wieberg, a former Big 12 commissioner who came from the Big Ten Network; chief marketing office Danette Leighton, who headed marketing for the NBA's Sacramento Kings; general counsel Woodie Dixon, a former general counsel for the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs; and senior woman administrator Gloria Nevarez, who held the same position at Oklahoma.

"It's a culmination of deep intercollegiate experience, but feathering in people with professional sports experience like myself," Scott said. "It's indicative of the ambition that we have and where we're taking things."

This is where Colorado comes in. First on Scott's agenda is signing a lucrative TV contract. To get one, he must make the Pac-10 much more attractive than when predecessor Tom Hansen signed a \$52.3 million annual deal that ends after the 2011-12 basketball season. By comparison, the SEC's new 15-year contract is

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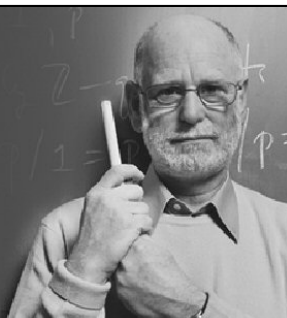


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worth \$200 million a year.

Expanding to new markets and adding a football championship game would add more meat to TV negotiations. Denver is the nation's 16th-largest TV market, six ahead of Portland, Ore. Salt Lake City, where the Pac-10 is eyeing Utah, ranks 31st, three behind San Diego.

The Pac-10 may not even stop at two teams. In a collegiate world rapidly headed toward bigger is better, Scott might consider a potential superconference involving two seven-team divisions.

"I have not ruled that out," Scott said.

Scott wants to decide by the end of this year. The linchpin is a football championship game, an unpopular idea in the past on the West Coast. The Pac-10 and Big East are the only BCS conferences that play a round-robin league football schedule.

"One thing you know about our league is we have a true conference champion because we play everyone," Oregon coach Chip Kelly said. "You don't get to miss somebody and when compared to another team, no one asks who they played and who you played."

Also, Hansen always believed a Pac-10 title game would have troubling drawing. How many fans would watch Oregon State vs. Arizona in the Los Angeles Coliseum? Then again, Scott said one possibility is having the highest-ranked

team host the title game.

Having a title game would help attract the likes of Colorado. DiStefano said the Big 12 championship football game helps generate \$2 million more a year for his school.

If the Pac-10 does expand, Colorado is expected to be high on its list. CU not only meets Scott's criteria, it appeals to Pac-10 coaches.

"I think it'd be a great university," Oregon State coach Mike Riley said. "It's a historic program. . . . By perception, it seems like our kind of school."

Added Kelly, "When you think of Colorado, it's one of the haves of college football."

Staff writer Tom Kensler contributed to this report.

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