

Woelk: Gold mine awaits Buffs in move to Pac-10

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Boulder Daily Camera

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A pack of 10 observations in the wake of recent developments. ...

The opportunity that awaits Colorado in the Pac-10 is one CU officials -- from the president's office on down -- can't afford to waste.

Colorado now has a two-year window to not only revitalize its current fan base, but greatly expand it. CU has given itself what amounts to a fresh start, and in order to take advantage, CU must move forward with authority.

Tops on the list is doing everything possible to become competitive in every arena. That means doing what's necessary to attract the best student-athletes, and doing everything possible to help them succeed when they arrive on campus.

It also means a commitment from the administration and faculty. It must be a commitment that expressly states a belief in the importance of being competitive, and not just being a conference member.

It also must be a commitment backed by actions, not just words.

Right now, there are roughly 40,000 CU alums on the West Coast. That's a gold mine in terms of donations and support -- not just for athletics, but for the university in general.

The best way to get their attention is to make some noise on the field and on the court.

It's an opportunity CU can't afford to let slip away.

One reason I think television ratings for the Pac-10 in general and Colorado in particular are going to be better than they were for Big 12 games? The number of West Coast transplants in general and the number of California transplants in particular who now call Colorado home.

According to the Colorado Division of Motor Vehicles, approximately 20,000 people per year from 2006 through 2008 traded their California license plates for Colorado plates.

If that number has held true for the last 10 years -- and odds are, it's grown in the last couple of years as people have escaped California's horrid economy -- that means roughly 300,000 folks from the West Coast have moved to our state in the last decade (figuring that each license plate represents at least 1.5 people).

That number dwarfs the influx from any other state.

Now, ask yourself which Saturday afternoon television game folks in Colorado are more likely to watch: Texas Tech vs. Oklahoma State or California vs. Oregon.

The addition of Utah and Colorado to the Pac-10 hasn't had folks in the Pacific Northwest exactly doing handstands.

In fact, a few of Colorado's soon-to-be new pals aren't too happy.

Here's what Ken Goe of the Portland Oregonian recently wrote: "Northwest fans shouldn't rush to embrace college football's new era, because if you follow Oregon, Oregon State, Washington or Washington State, you just got hosed."

Seems folks in the Northwest aren't overjoyed over possibly losing an annual trip to Los Angeles.

If the new Pac-10 divides into North and South divisions, it could cost the North teams their guaranteed annual trip to L.A.

Instead of playing at USC or UCLA every year, it would be only every other year. The Northwest schools recruit Los Angeles heavily, and playing there only once every two years probably wouldn't help those recruiting efforts.

This is going to make some friends of mine mad, but I'm going to write it anyway:

Adding baseball to CU's sports lineup would not be a good idea.

Colorado's spring weather is horrendous for baseball. The travel costs would be enormous; the price tag on a new facility would be equally daunting.

And, it would take CU forever and a day to get anywhere close to being competitive with the schools who can practice virtually year round.

Not a good idea.

If Colorado does add a few sports down the line, what are the best bets?

Women's softball might work. Yes, the weather is the same, but the window needed for a game is much smaller, and thus the chance of getting a game in would be much better. A softball facility is also cheaper than a baseball field.

As far as men's sport, my guess would be soccer, volleyball or a resumption of men's tennis. The facilities for all three sports are already in place.

Interesting note from Cliff Kirpatrick of the Corvallis Gazette-Times, who recently interviewed Oregon State coach Mike Riley, a good friend of CU's Dan Hawkins:

"During OSU's spring practice in April, Hawkins toured OSU facilities, sat in on meetings and practice to learn how the Beavers operate. It wasn't an issue since the teams don't schedule each other.

"Hawkins was even asked by the media his opinion of expansion with Colorado changing conferences. He laughed it off and said it would never happen."

Kirkpatrick then quoted Riley as saying, "Hawk must have known some stuff we didn't know about."

I don't think the move to the Pac-10 will greatly affect Colorado's recruiting in Texas. Honestly, coaches should be able to convince a kid from West Nowhere, Texas, of the benefits of a couple of West Coast trips every year.

Especially when his options are Lubbock, Stillwater, Ames, etc.

Just to set the record -- and Missouri's dull-witted governor, Jay Nixon -- straight, the departure of Colorado and Nebraska didn't rid the Big 12 of its worst basketball programs. Rather, the three schools with the fewest number of league victories since the inception of the Big 12 are Baylor, Texas Tech and Texas A&M.

And yes, they're all still in the Big 12.

From the Dept. of Irony, how about the situation of new Buff hoopster Carlon Brown. The senior-to-be transferred in from Utah this year. He'll sit out next year -- which means he could be facing his former team twice in the same season if the Buffs and Utes start playing in the Pac-10 in the 2011-12 season.

And finally, some of the reports of Colorado's "exit penalty" from the Big 12 seem to be greatly exaggerated. My guess -- and it's just a guess -- is that the Buffs and Nebraska will both end up doling out a few million dollars and all parties involved will move on.

It will be worth every penny.

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college sports

CU football should get \$14.5 million a year from TV for starters

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

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Mascot "Ralphie" gets in some spring practice. The University of Colorado Spring Football game is held at Folsom Field in Boulder, CO on Saturday, April 25, 2009. The spring game is a standard scrimmage with four, ten minute quarters and three time outs per half. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott spent the last nine days praising everything from Colorado's mascot to Utah's BCS-busting football team in welcoming the schools to the conference.

However, when he signs off on a projected whopper television contract this upcoming school year, the additions of the nation's 18th and 36th biggest TV markets, respectively, won't be the main reasons.

Sports media analysts say the biggest boon to conference expansion is the expansion of TV networks. From ESPN to Comcast to Versus, the TV marketplace is filled with competition, all wanting a piece of the college football audience.

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"Colorado and Utah don't add that much," said A. J. Maestas, president of Chicago-based Navigate Marketing, which helps schools assess their market value. "At the end of the day, it's about households, ratings, the total market that you reach. Although they're great markets, because there are some real strong markets in the Pac-10 like Los Angeles, you really don't add to the total average market.

"A little bit, but not a ton."

However, CU athletic director Mike Bohn, who engineered CU's move from the Big 12 two weeks ago, needn't worry.

With the addition of CU and Utah, Navigate projects the Pac-10's next TV deal should be worth about \$14.5 million per member school. That's nearly three times the Pac-10's current deal and more than \$5 million more than CU received last year from the Big 12.

That is based on other conference deals, fan bases, TV markets and the Navigate staff's knowledge of the industry. Considering the lofty numbers wheeling and dealing conference commissioners have thrown out, that seems low.

Here's why: It doesn't account for the wild bargaining that will likely take place between competing networks. Much has changed in the last five years. The number of sports channels has multiplied. Most professional sports have their own TV network.

There is an ESPN2 and an ESPN3. Comcast has merged with NBC-Universal. Conferences and schools offer bigger threats to start their own TV networks such as what the Big Ten and Mountain West have done and what the Texas Longhorns plan to do.

AT&T and Verizon have also become cable providers. AT&T now reaches 20 million homes, and Verizon reaches 15 million. That's a lot of money to advertisers, meaning that's a lot of money to conferences offering the games.

That, and starting a football championship game, will likely overcome a Pac-10 fan base that's less consumed as those in the Big 12, Southeastern Conference and Big Ten.

Although Maestas said of previous predictions, "\$17 million to \$20 million is an extreme stretch for the Big 12 or Pac-10," analysts do agree schools won't be hurting.

"You're going to get a significant increase in rights fees," said John Mansell, a sports media consultant in Great Falls, Va. "But the critical factor to determine how much of an increase you get is how much competition you have for those rights. That's the big plus. Right now, you have lots of competition."

It's clear why Scott swung for the deep seats in trying to lure five schools from the Big 12 South. That would have added the nation's seventh largest TV market with Dallas-Fort Worth and

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the 10th largest with Houston. The Pac-10 could've had eight of the top 19 media markets in the country.

"They would be by far the biggest, most super conference," said Robert Tuchman, founder of TSE Sports & Entertainment, a New York sports marketing company.

Maestas, who has a bachelor's degree from Washington and a master's from Arizona State, has different projections for the Big 12 than what Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe promised the South Division schools he lured back.

Maestas projects the remaining 10 Big 12 schools will receive \$13.5 million each, but again, that's before bargaining.

"It'll be similar to the Pac-10 per school," he said. "It's not realistic that Beebe's going to give Texas and Oklahoma and (Texas) A&M \$20 million (each) and all the have-nots \$14 million to \$17 million. They can distribute that kind of ratio, but the total pie won't be large enough to add up to that."

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College expansion didn't turn out how people expected

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The huge movement that everybody expected in college football didn't happen, though I don't think the moving around is quite done.

Texas, thought to be the linchpin of the movement, rejected the Pac-10 and stayed in the Big 12 along with the other Texas schools. Go figure. The only thing that I can figure is that the Longhorns felt they could get a better TV contract if they stayed put.

That's what all the movement was about - money.

It's why the Mountain West Conference went after Boise State. The addition of the Broncos gives the MWC a solid second team to go along with BYU. It's too bad Utah left for the Pac-10 because a trio of Boise State, Utah and BYU is pretty formidable. The MWC thinks that the addition of the Broncos will be enough for them to get recognition from the BCS and get an automatic bid. That's a dangerous thought process, because overall, the MWC is tougher and deeper than the WAC even before Boise decided to jump ship, and the Broncos may not be able to routinely run the table like they used to do in the WAC.

I thought the MWC would try to get 12 teams so they could have a playoff, but that doesn't appear to be in the cards. I think that would have been the smarter route to go. Sure it means the money is split more ways, but it gives the conference recognition. I know that Fresno State and Nevada would join the MWC in a heartbeat, and that would make sense geographically.

- I was glad to see Utah move over to the Pac-10. The Utes are solid in the major sports (football, men's basketball and women's basketball), and that's the most important thing about this move. Utah is not very good in baseball however, and Colorado, the other new addition to the Pac-10, doesn't have a baseball program. It will be interesting to see if Colorado is forced to add baseball at some point.

I think Colorado could be a first-division team in football, especially with Dan Hawkins at the helm. Being in the Pac-10 will do wonders for Colorado's recruiting efforts. The move means that Colorado could make some significant inroads in the California area; even more than they've done already. Hawkins has coaches in California, and he knows the quality of football played there. There are already 21 Californians ready to play for Hawkins in 2010.

- Obviously WAC commissioner Karl Benson is playing things close to the vest these days. I've already said that he should look for two schools and get the conference up to 10. An eight team football conference isn't good; makes it tough to get non-conference opponents. A nine-team conference makes for travel problems for basketball and volleyball.

I'd love to see the WAC take a run at one or two of its former members, namely UTEP and Rice. UTEP is a mere 40 miles from New Mexico State.

Unless the WAC can steal a team from Conference USA or the Sun Belt, it will have to grab teams from the Big Sky or possibly Big West. The issue that schools are going to have with the WAC is the travel. Going to Ruston and Hawaii isn't cheap, and with the economy being what it is ...

- Carson High graduate Nate White begins his second season of professional baseball umpiring on Monday when the short-season Class A Pioneer League gets under way. White worked in Arizona last year. Here's hoping that Nate has a successful season.

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