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tom kensler

Kensler: Former CU coach Harrington likes Buffs' second hiring of Abatemarco

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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SPOKANE, Wash. — Yes, that was a familiar face near Maryland coach Gary Williams on the Terrapins' bench Friday night during an NCAA Tournament first-round game against Houston.

Former Colorado coach Joe Harrington returned to his alma mater three years ago after working in real estate for several years in Northern Virginia. Harrington's official title is director of men's basketball student-athlete services, but he offers as much advice to Williams as any official assistant coach.

I found Harrington in the Terps' locker room and

asked him about Tom Abatemarco, who is returning to Colorado as an assistant coach — his title in the early 1990s under Harrington.

My timing was good. Abatemarco had called Harrington with the news a day earlier.

"Tom is very excited," Harrington said. "I'm happy for him. He wanted to get back into college coaching. Getting back to the University of Colorado is a good move for him because he knows the school. I think he and Jeff Bzdelik will work together well."

Harrington believes Abatemarco, who was an assistant to Jim Valvano when North Carolina State won the 1983 national championship, will bring CU more talent.

"He's a tireless worker," Harrington said. "And he loves recruiting. He loves basketball. He loves people."

An added benefit, Harrington said, is that Abatemarco has been in California for years, including a stint as head coach at Sacramento State and in various positions with the NBA's Sacramento Kings and WNBA's Sacramento Monarchs.

"I think that's going to help him in recruiting, particularly if Colorado goes to the Pac-10," Harrington said. "He's going to have a great recruiting base in California. That will help get good players to CU."

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Go, underdog!

It certainly is the American way. You would think a percentage of spectators at Spokane Arena would show some sympathy for Purdue and cheer on the fourth-seeded Boilermakers, who suffered a devastating loss two weeks before the end of the regular season when their best player, forward Robbie Hummel, tore an ACL.

Nope. Of the fans without a vested interest in Purdue, the vast majority pulled for No. 13 seed Siena, judging by the roars after baskets by the Saints.

Still searching.

Six games have passed since Hummel's season-ending injury, but Purdue coach Matt Painter continues to try different combinations. A 3-pointer in the first half by 6-foot-3 Ryne Smith that tied the game at 22-22 was the first basket scored by the reserve sophomore guard since a Jan. 9 loss at Wisconsin — a scoreless drought of 17 games.

College Station a hoops haven?

Texas A&M senior captain Donald Sloan chuckled and shook his head when asked if he hadn't gotten the memo that this was supposed to be a football school.

As hard as it might be for some to believe, the Aggies' 69-53 victory over Utah State means Texas A&M has joined Pittsburgh as the only

schools to advance past the first round in each of the past five NCAA Tournaments.

"Everybody supports football. We support football," Sloan said. "But we've been able to do some pretty good things basketball-wise. Students actually camped out before games to get tickets. It's getting crazy."

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