

Woelk: New facility a nice boost for Buff teams

Camera staff
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In the summer of 1991, the Colorado athletic department celebrated the grand opening of the Dal Ward Athletic Center.

It marked a new era for the Buffs. Coming on the heels of CU's 1990 national football championship, Dal Ward was a state-of-the-art facility when it opened, a building that moved the Buffs into the same neighborhood as the nation's elite programs. It was -- and still is -- a brick-and-mortar tribute to the man who put CU football on the map, Bill McCartney.

Fast-forward 20 years. For the first time in two decades, CU is ready to take another major step forward when officials break ground today on a new practice facility for the men's and women's basketball teams and the volleyball team.

It's been a long time coming.

Since the construction of Dal Ward, facilities improvement at CU has come in fits and starts -- mostly fits.

For the last half of the 1990s, improvements were minimal. CU's competition caught, then passed, the Buffs. When CU joined the Big 12, the gap became even greater as the "arms race" escalated. Colorado's facilities began to become outdated at a rapid pace when compared to its league brethren.

CU did commit to one major facilities improvement in the early 2000s by expanding Folsom Field with luxury suites and club seats in 2003. But thanks to a variety of economic conditions and other factors, those suites and seats have yet to provide the annual economic benefit officials originally projected, and thus have had minimal impact on CU's student-athletes.

Not that there haven't been some steps forward in recent years. The renovation of Prentup Field into a soccer stadium has helped increase attendance and allowed CU to host NCAA Tournament matches. Other improvements include a football practice bubble, renovated locker rooms for the football and basketball teams, a new basketball operations center, resurfacing of the Potts Field track, a new floor at the Coors Events Center, tennis courts on the South Campus and -- thanks to a major donation -- a golf course the Buffs can call "home."

But most of those are smaller-scale improvements that CU has managed to piece together despite serious fiscal challenges. It's a tribute to CU's administration -- from chancellor Phil DiStefano on down -- that the Buffs have managed as much as they have.

Still, CU hasn't been able to build something to match the scale of Dal Ward.

Until now.

Construction of the basketball-volleyball facility, scheduled to begin in earnest in April, will directly benefit three of CU's higher profile teams. The facility will include two basketball practice courts as well as a specific volleyball ops center. It will also include new locker rooms for the women's basketball team, which will then allow the volleyball team to move into the Coors Events Center on a full-time basis.

In short, it will be the most significant facilities-improvement project at CU in 20 years, and it will come at a cost. Estimates for the building that will be completed in the spring of 2011 range between \$10 million and \$12 million.

That's a hefty price tag.

There are places in the Big 12 where \$11 million projects are completed with a shrug. But for Colorado, it's a major project -- and for the basketball teams, it's the most significant improvement since the Events Center was completed in 1979.

It means that two programs that have far too often been given short shrift will at least level the playing field somewhat in

terms of their Big 12 competition. It means CU's teams won't have to find practice time at local high schools when the Events Center is being used for exams or other functions. It means the three teams involved won't have to stagger practice times, and there will always be a practice floor available when needed -- something that's certainly not the case today.

And, yes, it will help in recruiting. High school kids are impressed by facilities. They want to know that the program they sign with is important to its athletic department. They want to know that they'll have what their competition has.

Simply, they want to know that they matter.

Today, CU is sending the message that its basketball and volleyball programs do matter -- and that's a solid step forward.

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MARCH 25, 2010, 8:25 AM

Practice facility to keep CU teams from getting booted out

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

In advance of today's groundbreaking, more than one Colorado fan asked me why in the world would CU need a \$10.8 million practice facility for its men's and women's basketball teams and for women's volleyball?

"Don't those teams practice in the Coors Events Center?" comes next.

The answer is yes — except when the CEC is hosting conferences, concerts and exams. Yes, mid-term and final exams.

I have a personal story. After doing post-practice hoops interviews a couple of years ago, I headed to the media room inside the CEC, at about 4 p.m., to write something for the paper. At 5 p.m., the door opened behind me and more than a dozen students began streaming in. I introduced myself to what I guessed was the professor, and before I could say anything he said, "Sorry. We have reserved this room for an exam."

So I packed up and headed to a coffee shop to finish writing.

Teams get kicked out far more often. Former CU men's basketball coach Ricardo Patton liked to take his players to Centaurus High in Lafayette for practices when there was a conflict. Current coach Jeff Bzdelik has elected to have his team avoid an afternoon conflict by practicing at 8 a.m. on occasion.

Even when there are no conflicts from outside agencies in the CEC, the volleyball team often must practice in the evening because the two basketball teams go back-to-back in the afternoon.

Practicing in the early morning or in the evening is not ideal for student-athletes. They might have classes during those times.

So, I tell those who ask, the new practice facility (scheduled to open by August 2011) will be more than a fancy carrott that coaches can dangle in front of prospective recruits. Although that will be a huge benefit as well.

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CU Buffs ready to break ground on the future

Ceremony for new hoops-volleyball facility set today

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Jeff Bzdelik is high (facility) maintenance.

When Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn and then-chancellor Bud Peterson made the pitch to the veteran coach to leave Air Force and accept the challenge of rebuilding the Buffs, Bzdelik was very blunt about how much the program was lagging behind the competition in the Big 12.

"The first thing I said to the chancellor was, 'Yes, you have a beautiful location, you have a great academic institution, but you do have the worst facilities in the Big 12 ... and you're kidding yourself if you think you can compete on a yearly basis in this league,'" Bzdelik told reporters at Big 12 media days on Oct. 17, 2007, prior to his first season at CU. "Because let's face it, what do 18-year-olds want to see? ... It's in my contract they have to build a practice facility within three years."

At 1 p.m. today, chancellor Phil DiStefano will join Bohn at the Coors Events Center at a groundbreaking ceremony for the basketball/volleyball practice facility expected to cost between \$10 and \$12 million.

The event is free and is open to the public; those interested in attending can park in the garage structure (Lot 436) off Regent Drive and Colorado Avenue.

During a round-table discussion with the media in February, Bohn said: "I guarantee you we're moving dirt in early April."

Getting the project started satisfies a clause in Bzdelik's contract that required construction to be under way by the start of his fourth year on the job or he would be free to accept a job elsewhere without owing CU any money through his buyout clause.

Encouraged by a 15-16 season that included a 13-3 home record, an eighth-place finish in the Big 12, and a solid returning talent base led by Cory Higgins and Alec Burks, Bohn has said he plans to work on an extension for Bzdelik, who has two years remaining on his original deal. Since Bzdelik was hired, CU's facilities have already been upgraded significantly with a new basketball operations center that includes coaches offices and state-of-the-art video production equipment, a new weight room and a posh new men's locker room.

"I'm just concerned with my team playing with a desperate effort and playing as well as they can individually and collectively and getting better on a daily basis," Bzdelik said. "If we couple that with new facilities and couple that with some really solid recruiting classes then eventually the winning and losing will take care of itself in a positive way."

The practice facility, which will be located on the north side of the Coors Events Center, will include two NCAA regulation size (50' x 94') basketball practice floors, to be shared by the basketball and volleyball programs.

A volleyball operations center will also be a part of the project.

"Basically, volleyball at CU is going to have an entirely new home. It's a big deal," Buffs volleyball coach Liz Kritza said. "Especially where we are in our first year trying to create a buzz about the program. This will only enhance our vision for the program."

Kritza said the timing of the groundbreaking is perfect as her staff attempts to seal the deal with a number of big-time recruits who would be able to utilize the facility for the bulk of their careers.

"It puts us on par with top programs in the nation," Kritza said. "Our kids will be able to train, watch film and practice in the same facility. It will make us much more efficient as a program. And having the gyms to practice in is so important. That's where it all starts."

Currently, the three teams are sharing the floor in the Coors Events Center, which creates challenging practice schedules. The project is scheduled to be completed by April 2011.

"We're building this program the right way, in a very competitive way," Bzdelik said after CU's 2009-10 season ended with a loss to Texas Tech at the Big 12 tournament 15 days ago. "And we need to understand that."

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Bzdelik thrilled with facility groundbreaking

David Tauchen 12 days ago

BOULDER (AP) - The University of Colorado fulfilled a clause in men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik's contract by breaking ground on a new practice facility Thursday.

Now, if Bzdelik were to leave for another school in the next two years - and he insists he's in Boulder for the long haul - CU would be owed \$500,000. Had ground not been broken on the facility, Bzdelik's buyout would have gone down to zero if another university tried to lure him from Boulder.

Adjacent to the Coors Events Center, the new \$10.8 million facility -- funded through private donations -- will be used by both the men's and women's basketball teams and the volleyball team.

It will add 35,000 square feet to the arena and feature two dedicated basketball-volleyball courts, locker rooms, coaches offices and team meeting rooms.

The target date for completion is August 2011.

Athletic director Mike Bohn said the new facility will eliminate the challenges of aligning practice times with class schedules for student-athletes. Because the Coors Events Center is used for other events such as conferences, concerts and class exams, the new facility will eliminate conflicts for those other non-sports uses.

Bzdelik said the new digs will help in recruiting but he stressed that the overall student body, and not just athletes, will benefit.

"Kids that want to pursue excellence need a facility in which to pursue it, it's that simple," Bzdelik said, adding: "This facility benefits all students. When we have to go to the Rec Center, we take time from other students using the Rec Center. And I know there has been a couple of times we had to go in there and tie up the Rec Center maybe for five hours between

Bzdelik insisted his contract clause that called for the groundbreaking "wasn't a big deal to me."

"When it's in writing it always holds people a little bit more accountable. There is a little bit more of a sense of urgency, not that there wasn't, but it helps," he said.

Bzdelik asked for the clause in his contract when he left Air for the Buffaloes three years ago.

"It was not to benefit me, it was to benefit the program," Bzdelik said. "I think that's the most important thing. It's not about me, it's not to benefit me. It's about benefiting the student-athlete."

Bzdelik said the Buffs' basketball program won't have to wait for the facility's completion to benefit from it, either.

"I think it's tangible evidence that when we bring a recruit in now that they see things are happening. It's not just talk," Bzdelik said. "Now they see the new weight room, they see the new locker room, they see a structure being built. They go, 'Oh yeah, this is happening.'"

Bzdelik reiterated his intention to stay at Colorado.

"I'm deeply committed here from the standpoint that we're building this thing. I think people can see that the momentum is being built," he said.

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He noted his team went 13-3 last season and returns All-Big 12 player Cory Higgins and Alec Burks, the league's freshman of the year, in addition to freshman guard Shannon Sharpe, who was sidelined last season by an injury.

"Everything is going in a positive way," Bzdelik said. "Attendance has gone up 40 percent. We were 13-3 at home. We've played one of the nation's top 25 schedules. We were one game away from going to the NIT. We were two games away perhaps from the NCAA .

"All this is building, it's building, it's building. So I'm excited about the future and I think other people are and we just keep moving forward."

Asked if he'll be in Boulder for a while then, Bzdelik replied: "Unless they tell me not to and I hope that doesn't happen."

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Groundbreaking buzzer-beater: Moving ahead with practice facility meets condition of Bzdelik's contract

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The Colorado athletic department beat a deadline Thursday when it broke ground on the basketball/volleyball practice facility it plans to build adjacent to the north end of the Coors Events Center. That deadline involved its men's basketball coach.

CU needed to break ground on the facility before the start of coach Jeff Bzdelik's fourth year with the program or he could leave without being responsible for liquidated damages, according to senior associate athletic director Tom McGrath. That means Bzdelik's buyout would cancel. CU announced Bzdelik's hiring on April 4, 2007.

Athletic director Mike Bohn said in February he planned to discuss extending Bzdelik's original five-year deal at the appropriate time following the season. But according to Bzdelik's original contract, it will cost someone \$500,000 to buy it out in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Bzdelik said Thursday having that clause in the contract was his idea.

"That wasn't a big deal to me," Bzdelik said. "When it's in writing it always holds people a little bit more accountable. There's a little bit more of a sense of urgency. Not that there wasn't.

"It's not about me. It's about benefiting the student athlete."

That was the main point the entire athletic department wanted to make Thursday as it celebrated the groundbreaking before an audience that included university president Bruce Benson and CU-Boulder chancellor Phil DiStefano. The 35,644-square-foot building is expected to relieve much of the scheduling problems that have hindered the volleyball and men's and women's basketball teams, who've shared the Coors Events Center with the rest of the university.

"If one of the three sports had to change — and schedule changes are part of what we do — then we were so interconnected that the other two sports would have to change as well," volleyball coach Liz Kritza said.

CU reported Thursday the facility's target date for completion is August 2011. It will cost \$10.8 million and is being funded solely by private donations.

Bohn said the entire \$10.8 million has yet to be raised, but "we'll utilize resources from our auxiliary partners' commitments to keep it moving forward."

Bohn said between the donations and auxiliary sources, CU has more than 80 percent of the funds to be dedicated to the project.



CU president Bruce Benson, left, and athletic director Mike Bohn don hard hats Thursday during the groundbreaking ceremony for CU's new basketball/volleyball practice facility. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

Bzdelik said when his team has been unable to practice in Coors, it has used the campus rec center, the Pepsi Center in Denver or the Broomfield Events Center (now called the 1stBank Center). Many practices have been held at early morning hours, as well.

Bzdelik said the rest of the student body suffered when his and the women's basketball teams occupied the courts at the rec center for five hours at a time. He added that players in all three programs have faced scheduling problems when a course they needed conflicted with practice times in Coors.

Not including athletic practices, the Coors Events Center annually hosts 180 events. That figures accounts for the games, exams, meetings, conferences, camps, high school games, concerts and more.

"You could go on and on and on about why this is important to us," Bzdelik said. "Because it benefits all athletes in a different ways.

"When you're recruiting 17-, 18-year-olds ... unfortunately we live in a society where the majority of them are enamored with material things and when everyone else has one that's a multi-million dollar facility, unfortunately they're swayed by that.

"I think this is tangible evidence of when we bring a recruit in, they see things are happening; it's not just talk."

Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@timescall.com.