

Woelk: Enthusiasm, expectations alive and well with Buff fans

Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 05/21/2010 11:35:23 PM MDT

Five days, 31 stops, hundreds of miles, a thousand fans -- and one very tired bunch of Colorado coaches and officials.

The 2010 Colorado Coaches Tour came to a close Friday afternoon at the Omni Interlocken, the last of seven stops on a day that started in Loveland, continued through Longmont and Boulder, and finished up in Broomfield.

The barnstormers hit spots up and down the Front Range during the week. They left early and came home late. They ventured out onto the eastern plains and motored up into the mountains. It was an extended meet, greet and get-acquainted session that was designed to generate some positive vibes for the athletic department.

In that regard, they achieved their goal.

They'll catch up on their sleep next week.

New hoops coaches Tad Boyle and Linda Lappe met their constituency for the first time. Volleyball coach Liz Kritza, a veteran of a year on the job at CU, finally had the opportunity to see folks somewhere other than inside the Coors Events Center.

Even football coach Dan Hawkins, who's no stranger to the state, made some new friends, while also catching up with some familiar faces.

But like any lengthy excursion worth the effort, CU's coaches and administrators came home with a little more than they'd bargained for. They found out that there is still a healthy contingent of folks out there who support the program. It's not all gloom and doom. At stop after stop, the CU contingent met with excited, enthusiastic Buff faithful.

That left a smile on the CU group's faces that will last well into the summer.

"We had an initial goal in mind with this, and that was to go out and meet people and say 'Thank you' for their support," athletic director Mike Bohn said. "But honestly, after this week, I think we underestimated the benefits.

"What happened is that we came away with the inspiration. Our fans inspired us. We got to experience a level of encouragement from our fan base and booster base that said, 'Hey, we're with you. We're supporting you. Now get this thing going, because our expectations remain high.'"

That was the message of the day -- and the week.

"I think there are a lot of folks out there who are passionately optimistic," said Loveland resident Harry Devereaux. "Anybody who's involved in business knows that if you build it right, you don't do it overnight -- but you build it to last.

"I don't think anyone's level of expectations has changed. I don't think the bar has been lowered. We want to win games, we want to be competitive in the Big 12 and we want to go to a bowl game. But at the same time, we know that they are adhering to the right principles at the University of Colorado, and if you believe in CU and the state, that's important."

And what did the coaches tell the fans? A sampling from Friday's stops ...

Hawkins talked CU's new practice schedule, which will see players on the field from 7:45-9:45 a.m. daily. The reason, Hawkins said, is that CU's class schedules have gradually changed over the years, to the point that more classes are offered in the afternoon hours and fewer in the morning.

"Our guys are excited," Hawkins said. "They're going to be able to get up, get to practice and then have more classroom opportunities in the afternoon."

Boyle talked about his coaching days at Longmont High School: "It means a lot for me to be here. My first head coaching job was here. And I promise you this: I'm a lot better coach today than I was then. When I run into some of my former players, I always offer to pay for those first three therapy sessions."

Hawkins also addressed some changes in CU's coaching staff. "We made some improvements in places. We fired the last receivers coach and made a big upgrade right there." (Hawkins coached CU's wide receivers last year.)

Kritza on recruiting. "You'll find plenty of Colorado kids on our rosters. You'll see names you know."

Lappe on the Big 12. "We play in the toughest conference in the nation and we know what's ahead of us. But you've motivated us. We'll make you proud."

Hawkins, in response to a query concerning the Buffs' kicking game: "This is where my therapist tells me to lie down and find my happy place."

Yes, there were some pointed questions.

Bohn addressed football season ticket sales and noted that they were down from past years. The hoops coaches were asked about recruiting. Fans wanted to know why CU's football uniforms won't have the players' names on them this year (the decision was reached by a vote of the team).

The topics were as varied as the stops.

But for a program that's endured some rough times in recent years, the mood was upbeat -- surprisingly so.

"It was productive," Bohn said at day's end. "I think it was great for all our coaches to get out there. For Linda and Tad and Liz, it was a chance to get to know the people who are behind them. For Dan, it was a chance to confirm that there's some support throughout the state.

"But the big thing for all of us was that everyone had a message. They're behind us -- and now they expect us to produce."

Close Window

Send To Printer