

# Coaching was always McCartney's plan

## Former Buffs boss on college Hall of Fame ballot

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When he swept the national coach of the year awards in college football in 1989 leading the Colorado Buffaloes to an undefeated regular season, Bill McCartney needed to share the moment with one person in particular.

He put in a call to his friend and mentor, Bo Schembechler, back in Michigan. McCartney just wanted Schembechler to know that so much of what he had learned while coaching under him at Michigan made its way a thousand miles west and was now at work in Boulder, too.

McCartney says if he is ever fortunate enough to earn induction into the College Football Hall of Fame, he will certainly have Schembechler on his mind again, along with the hundreds of players and dozens of assistant coaches who helped him achieve so much at CU.

The first chance of that happening will come next week when the 2010 inductees are announced on Thursday. McCartney is on the ballot for the first time and is one of seven coaches being considered this year.

"I'm not in his class. He's at a whole different level," McCartney said about the possibility of being selected for the Hall where a bust of Schembechler already resides. "But I appreciate, and if they were to put me in the same kind of category that he's in, I would know that I don't belong there, but I'll take it."

From the time he was 7 years old, McCartney said he knew he wanted to be a coach. Something about sports and competition put a charge in him and he particularly loved the strategy within the game.

He played football at Missouri and became a coach for the first time shortly after graduating. His older brother, Tom, hired him as an assistant at Holy Redeemer High School in Detroit. When McCartney later became a head coach of both football and basketball at a Dearborn, Mich., high school, he caught Schembechler's eye.

"From the very beginning, I always watched my coaches and tried to learn from them," McCartney said. "When I was just a little kid, I could tell you what the good coaches were doing. I just paid attention to it. I always knew that's what I wanted to do.

"I guess as a kid you think, 'Now that's not work. If you could do that for the rest of your life, you don't even have to work for a living. They're playing a game. I'd get to play games all my life for a living?'"

McCartney was hired as head coach at Colorado in 1982 and the decision didn't appear to be among the best ever made by school administrators after his first three seasons. McCartney went 7-25-1 those three years.

"They could have put me in the street and nobody would have hiccuped, but they didn't. They gave me a new contract," McCartney said. "And, of course, it turned around. So I'll always feel a loyalty and a debt of gratitude to CU, to the whole university, not just football, because they stuck with me."

The school and its fans were rewarded with a historic run of winning seasons, bowl games, national rankings and individual awards the program has been trying to live up to ever since. McCartney unexpectedly retired from coaching after the 1994 season at age 55, in the prime of his coaching career.

The Buffs never dropped out of the top 25 throughout his final six seasons. He remains the winningest football coach in Colorado history with a 93-55-5 record, including three consecutive Big Eight Conference championships (1989-1991) and the school's only national championship in football in 1990.

Many probably believe it is the memory of that culminating victory in the Orange Bowl over Notre Dame to end the 1990

season that McCartney loves most.

The truth is, the two favorite games of his career with CU came on the road. One occurred earlier in the 1990 season at Nebraska, when the Buffs rallied from a 12-0 deficit to beat their nemesis 27-12 in freezing wind and rain.

McCartney's other favorite moment came back in Michigan in 1994 when quarterback Kordell Stewart heaved the football through fading light and somehow found the hands of receiver Michael Westbrook for a touchdown on the final play of the game.

Both teams had been undefeated and ranked in the top-10 nationally. McCartney watched the thrilled faces of his players as they piled on top of one another in the end zone.

"You got to know winning at Michigan was easily the single greatest moment for me," he said. "To come in there in that setting, with those circumstances and to beat them in Ann Arbor, it doesn't get any sweeter. That is pure sugar."

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