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fan mail

Jon Embree: New CU coach talks toughness, recruiting and uniforms

By The Denver Post

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Ever wanted to ask a sports personality a question? Now's your chance. They will answer readers' questions in The Denver Post's "Fan Mail" feature.

In this edition, new Colorado football coach Jon Embree talks about in-state recruiting, making the Buffs more speedy and his thoughts on CU's uniforms.

Keep an eye out for next week's installment. Send your Qs in an email to fanmail@denverpost.com.

Welcome back Coach Embree! I'm another hard-core Buffs fan living on the East Coast. It's been tough over the last several years.

One thing I've noticed is that it seems like our team speed has declined quite a bit. Can you address the speed issue and what role that will play in recruiting strategy as you put together this class?

— Jay, Warwick, R.I.

Jon Embree: We're going to try and recruit as much speed in here as we can. We're not as fast or strong as we played against, or as fast as some of those teams are in our new conference (the Pac 12), so we need to upgrade in all areas.

Who will be calling the plays? Will (offensive coordinator) Eric Bieniemy be on the sidelines or in the booth?

— Phil, Los Angeles

JE: Eric Bieniemy will be calling plays on offense. My initial gut feeling is that he will be on the sidelines.

Dave Logan has done a fantastic job of building Mullen into the elite high school program in Colorado. However, not that many of the blue-chippers from Mullen find their way to Boulder. This is a little surprising to me since Logan had a great career as a Buff. I'm not sure if Dave had a falling out with CU, but it sure would be nice to see those kids stay in state. What are your plans to keep the blue chippers in state, and specifically from Mullen?

— Tim, Pasco, Wash.

JE: I met with Dave Logan (on Wednesday), we have a great

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relationship. I talked with him even before I took the job. I've always had a good relationship with Dave. He will help us, but he's never been a

Sports Fan Mail

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coach that has pressured his players to go anywhere, so that's up to us to get those guys.

For in-state kids, we have to do a good job of identifying them early, getting them up here. You can't recruit in-state kids here as an afterthought. You can't get them, or get to them as seniors, so you have to do a good job their sophomore and junior years building a relationship with them.

Will Tyler Hansen have a leg up because of his seniority or will some of the younger quarterbacks have a chance right away?

— *Steven, Boulder*

JE: It's going to be equal all the way because it's a new system. You can't say Tyler has a leg up because he knows plays like he would have if we had stayed in the same offense. Everybody's going to have an equal chance.

Coach Embree, what do you plan to do about our uniforms? The uniforms we wore on the road this year and our home uniforms from 2007-09 were awful. I love the home uniforms from this year (the 1990 throwback uniforms as they were referred to). I know everyone else I spoke with loved them, too. Please keep these uniforms or have Nike put together something more classic with the Colorado name clearly visible on the front of the uniform.

— *Adam, Denver*

JE: We're in the process of discussing our uniforms,



New CU football coach Jon Embree stands next to Ralphie, the school mascot. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

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but there are so many things I have to do before I can really address that. I can tell you this: we will be white with black pants on the road and black with gold pants at home. We won't be white on white on the road anymore. The uniform will have a clean look and players will have their names on the back.

Will you have a special teams coach or handle that unit as a staff? What is your plan for that a ll-important, too often under emphasized unit?

— *David, Lafayette*

JE: On special teams, we will get our best players out there, it's not just playing bodies. You will see a significant amount of starters out there. That's an important part of the game, you often win or lose games there. We will have a special teams coach.

You've talked about a return to physicality. What is your way to prepare CU's athletes to be able to perform to their highest capability, prepare them for the NFL and maintain their individual and team health?

— *Bob, Great Bend, Kan.*

JE: In the weight room there's some core lifts you have to do, squats is one of them, bench and probably some cleans. You have to incorporate a lot of functional lifting. For instance, very rarely are you on two feet during a game — you're usually on one leg or out of balance a little bit — so you have to incorporate lifts that allow you to do football movements, it can't just be an old-school lifting regimen.

saw a photo of you with Ed Reinhardt during the press conference. The two of your were quite close before Ed's injury, and I believed they've stayed in touch. Do you have a special fond memory of Ed you can share with us?

— *Carl, Louisville*

JE: Every time I see Ed I think about what happened. What I remember most is lying in our beds in our room before the Oregon game watching cartoons and talking about the game and how we saw things. Both of us are football junkies, we were roommates during camp and on the road, so we always talked football.

We always talked about plays: "Well, here's what I'm seeing and thinking, if they do this or that, this should be open." And later that day, life for one of us, really both of us, changed in an instant.

(Editor's note: Reinhardt was a CU sophomore when he suffered a traumatic brain injury after being tackled during at game at Oregon on Sept. 15, 1984.)

Almost every offense that is successful runs seven vs. eight (or some variant) rushing drills to be able to learn to run the ball successfully. Coach (Dan) Hawkins did not do this and our running game suffered because of it. Will you instill a sense of toughness in the run game?

— *Lee, Louisville*

JE: We will do some 9-on-7, but I'm going to do more team run drills because the receivers have

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to block, the safeties have to fit and the corners have to replace the safeties when they're getting blocked. We will do more team run drills and do something along those lines every day.

Jon Embree, 45, a star tight end for CU in the mid-1980s and a one-time assistant coach for the Buffs, was hired earlier this month as the Buffs' new coach.

"This is a dream come true," Embree said. "When I stepped on the field for my first spring practice here as a volunteer coach (in 1991), I started to envision what it would be like to come back one day and be the head coach of this great university. It's truly a privilege when you have the opportunity to become head coach at your alma mater."

Embree is the 24th full-time coach in the school's history and the first African-American named to the position. He had been in his first year as the Washington Redskins tight ends coach under Mike Shanahan, the former Broncos head coach. Prior to his stint with the Redskins, Embree was an assistant for three years with the Kansas City Chiefs.

Embree replaced former head coach Dan Hawkins, who was fired on November 9 after posting a 19-39 record over the better part of five seasons.

Embree is the third CU head football coach who graduated from the school. He earned his degree in Communication in 1987.

After a standout prep career at Cherry Creek High School, Embree earned four letters as a Buffalo. In 1984, he earned first-team All-Big 8 honors after setting school single-season records for receptions (51) and receiving yards (680).

A sixth-round draft pick by the Los Angeles Rams in the 1987 NFL Draft, Embree played two seasons with the Rams before suffering a career-ending elbow injury in 1989 while a member of the Seattle Seahawks.

He quickly turned to coaching and brings 18 years of experience to the CU program, including 10 seasons (1993-2002) as an assistant on the Colorado staff under three different head coaches, Bill McCartney (1993-94), Rick Neuheisel (1995-98) and Gary Barnett (1999-2002).

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