

Buffaloes coach Embree relies on instinct in shaping program

New football chief impressed committee with 6-month plan

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Earlier this fall before the Colorado football coaching job had even opened up, Jon Embree began putting together a six-month plan for how he would attack the program's problems if he was hired to replace former coach Dan Hawkins.

Athletic director Mike Bohn and faculty athletic representative David Clough, who chaired the football coach search committee, said that preparation was evident when Embree interviewed for the job, and it made a big enough impression that Embree ultimately was selected to lead the program.

Embree's six-month plan addressed hiring a coaching staff and a support staff, recruiting, installing his brand of offensive and defensive football in spring ball, beginning the 2012 recruiting cycle during the spring evaluation period in April and May and the move to the Pac-12 Conference next summer.

He knew the program inside and out as if he had been calling the shots all along. He laid out potential solutions to problems some members of the search committee hadn't even really considered as problems.

He was a step ahead.

"Ever since I became a full-time coach, that was always the goal," Embree said. "I've always been one of these people who believes you can learn a lot by listening and asking questions.

"There were times with certain coaches I would just ask, 'Why would you do this?'"

Embree said he began evaluating the teams he was coaching in June of every year during the mid-1990s when he was serving as an assistant in Boulder under former coach Rick Neuheisel. But these weren't ordinary evaluations of the state of the program, or franchise when he got to the NFL.

Embree said he approached the evaluations each year from the perspective of how he would change or fix things if he had just been hired as head coach. He believes it expanded his point of view and made him a better coach.

He said he took the idea from another former CU assistant coach, Karl Dorrell, and at about the same time, he learned former CU coach Gary Barnett used a similar approach.

At that point, Barnett was still the head coach at Northwestern and one summer day he happened to be in Boulder. Embree took the opportunity to meet Barnett for 90 minutes at the Boulderado Hotel to quiz him about his approach to breaking down a program in the offseason.

That meeting began what became a fascination for Embree. He soon was picking the brain of every head coach he could each summer.

"What I started doing was trying to interview coaches during that time frame and taking different things from them that I thought fit me, and that I liked and then making it my own," Embree said.

Over the years, he has taken notes on how coaches such as Bobby Bowden, Joe Paterno, John Robinson and former Dallas Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson went about their business.

Embree says he is attracted to players with similar curiosity and passion for learning about the game.

"I think people who ask why and are inquisitive are instinctual people, and this game is a lot of instinct," Embree said. "There is no book. ... There are people who are Football 101 and then there is instinct. And instinct has always been my

thing."

Embree said his plan is serving him well thus far in his first month on the job. There have been hiccups and there are more to come, but he trusts his vision because it comes from years of preparation, trial and error and the experiences of other successful coaches.

"You always have to be looking at a way to get an edge," Embree said. "If you're not inquisitive, if you're just a guy who gets your orders and goes to do what you're supposed to do, you're going to be limited in what you become."

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