

CU Buffs dish out pay raises for football assistant coaches

Assistant football coaching staff making \$857,109 more this year

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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University of Colorado officials have significantly raised the salary pool for assistant coaches in the school's football program, hoping to help it return to the winning ways of the past.

Contract figures for all nine assistant coaches obtained through open records requests by the Camera show the school has raised the salary pool for coach Jon Embree's nine full-time assistants by \$857,109, compared with what former coach Dan Hawkins' nine assistant coaches were making last season.

For years some fans and fellow coaches have questioned how serious Colorado is about fielding a winning college football team because the program consistently lagged behind competitors in compensating assistant coaches.

Athletic director Mike Bohn said he and Chancellor Phil Distefano recognized the problem in analyzing the salaries at other institutions and view the increased salary pool as an investment in the future of the program.

"It's the whole question about being competitive," Bohn said. "As we talked with Jon, from the very firsttime we talked with him in New York to finalize our job offer to him, we recognized the importance of having high quality assistant coaches with great experience, passion for CU and the ability to recruit marquee student-athletes."

Bohn credited Embree for putting the success of the program first.

Bohn said Embree agreed to a smaller guaranteed salary for himself in order to deepen the pool of money available to hire better assistants.

Embree's contract, which includes plenty of incentives for on-field success, pays him roughly \$725,000 in his first year in guaranteed compensation. Consider that Dan Hawkins was making \$1,391,903.

If the salaries for the two head coaches are included, CU raised its total football salary pool by \$200,000. However, Bohn said doing so at a time when the athletic department is dealing with temporary budget shortfalls related to its change in conferences is significant.

"Well those are obviously the biggest challenges we have with it, but the response from our boosters and supporters and sponsors has been very favorable and we recognize the ability to grow those resources to the point where we can properly fund the commitment we've made to Jon and the program," Bohn said.

Bohn said the coaching staff Embree has assembled compares favorably with any in CU history in terms of experience and reputation and is probably the best staff top to bottom since former coach Bill McCartney led the program.

A big chunk of the increase can be attributed to the multi-year deal signed by offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, who became the highest paid assistant in CU history when he agreed to a deal that pays him roughly \$500,000 annually.

If the \$150,000 signing bonus Bieniemy was given to leave his post as assistant head coach of the Minnesota Vikings is factored in, Colorado is paying its 2011 assistants more than \$1 million above what it paid its 2010 staff.

Six of Embree's nine assistant coaches are making \$225,000 or more and another is making \$195,000. Former offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau was the highest paid assistant under Hawkins, making \$217,976.

Longtime linebackers coach Brian Cabral, who was credited with holding the program together as interim head coach for the final three games last fall, was retained by Embree and received a \$76,000 raise.

Cabral is finally among the most well compensated coaches at CU going into his 23rd season as a member of the coaching staff.

The program has had some top-notch assistants over the years, but retaining many of them has always been a problem because other schools were willing to pay more.

Colorado and Colorado State are also unique in major college football because of a state law limiting the number of multi-year contracts a school can offer to six.

Multi-year deals for assistant coaches in football and men's basketball have become the norm across the nation, putting the Buffs and Rams at a disadvantage when it comes to hiring a retaining assistants.

But Colorado, in offering larger salaries, seems to have found an effective way to counter the problem.

Bohn said the salary pool for Colorado's assistant coaches will rank in the top half of the Pac-12 Conference when the Buffs join that league officially on July 1.

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