

Woelk: End of rivalry with Huskers downside of CU, NU moves

Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 07/12/2010 11:36:23 PM MDT

Nine words many folks probably never expected to see emanate from the keyboard of yours truly:

I will miss Colorado's annual football game against Nebraska.

Seriously. All jokes aside. No obligatory tractor references; no snide corn comments; no cheap shots at the only folks in the world who buy their clothes year-round at a Mall Santa outlet store.

Colorado football won't be the same without the Huskers. Not by a long shot. While positives supporting CU's move to the Pac-10 are many, bidding farewell to our pals in Lincoln isn't among them.

Colorado is headed to the Pac-10 in either 2011 or 2012. Nebraska is headed to the Big Ten in 2011. It means this year's game in Lincoln could very well be the last between the two in a long, long time.

You'll miss 'em, Buff fans. Admit it. While CU has enjoyed longstanding series and plenty of fireworks with numerous other schools over the years, no other opponent brings a Buff fan's blood to a boil as quickly as the Huskers.

That includes Colorado State. While the Rams nicely fill the bill as an in-state rival, their series with Colorado comes nowhere close to having the same kind of impact on Buff history.

Colorado and Colorado State didn't even play each other in football from 1959 through 1982, a 24-year stretch. Even when the series was resumed, it wasn't until 1995 that it became an annual affair again. There have been plenty of exciting games between the two schools, but you won't find a CU-CSU game on the all-time top 10 list of either program.

It's just not the same. The schools aren't in the same conference, and truth is, there has never been a deep-seated rivalry between the two -- not, at least, along the lines of Texas-Texas A&M, Kansas-Kansas State, Auburn-Alabama, Oklahoma-Oklahoma State, etc. There is usually the obligatory trash talk between fans in the weeks leading up to the game, but after it's over, they go their separate ways.

All is quiet on the Front Range.

That's not the case with Buffs and Huskers fans. Theirs is a year-round yap-fest, with fans of both schools frequenting the message boards and chat rooms of the other, teasing and taunting and generally doing whatever it takes to keep the edge sharp.

Colorado fans insist upon calling the series a rivalry; Nebraska fans for years resisted such a declaration.

They had their reasons. For 18 straight seasons, the Buffs lost to Nebraska, a stretch that included some of CU's worst losses ever (63-21 and 69-19, for starters). In that same stretch, Nebraska's epic rivalry with Oklahoma was no doubt the premier matchup in the Big Eight.

But the worm finally turned, even as Nebraska was extending the streak. When Bill McCartney arrived on CU's campus in 1982 and declared that Nebraska would be the program by which the Buffs would be measured, things began to change.

McCartney finally ended the slide in 1986 -- and when Barry Switzer left OU after the 1988 season, it left Colorado and Nebraska as the Big Eight's Big Two.

McCartney beat the Huskers two more times, along with tying them once -- and much to the dismay of then-coach Tom Osborne, actually won a national title before Osborne. That alone was enough to get the attention of Husker fans, who quickly put their decades-long rivalry with Oklahoma on the back burner.

A new favorite team to despise hit the top of their list.

Osborne didn't wait long to turn the tide again, beating McCartney in each of their last three meetings before going 3-0 against Rick Neuheisel, a stretch that saw the Huskers win three national titles.

Nebraska appeared to rule the roost again -- until Osborne retired, leaving Frank Solich to fill his shoes.

The rivalry waters began flowing in a different direction again.

In 2001, Gary Barnett's Buffs signaled the end of the Big Red dynasty when CU pounded the Huskers, 62-36. That started a stretch in which the Buffs won four of seven against Nebraska, and while the Huskers have won the last two, both have been competitive. The Huskers needed the longest field goal in school history to get a win in 2008, and left Boulder last year with a 28-20 win.

Now, the two schools will face each other just one more time as members of the same conference. When Colorado visits Lincoln on Nov. 26, it will signal the end of an era.

It won't be a happy day.

NU's fans have been called by some the best in college football. I'll stop short of that designation -- there are plenty of schools with great supporters that make game day in their stadium an experience worth remembering.

But no doubt, it's been fun sparring with Big Red folk over the years, an intensely loyal group. They support their program - with their passion and with their pocketbooks -- at a level only dreamed of by many other schools (Colorado included), and they take their program very, very seriously (maybe just a tad too seriously at times).

But most of all, they are unwavering in their belief that Nebraska is always on the cusp of resurrecting the glory days of Devaney and Osborne.

Simply, it's been a great series. A rivalry worth remembering.

And not seeing that red-letter day on the schedule in future years?

It just won't be the same.

Close Window

Send To Printer