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colorado football

History comes calling at Boulder football camp

By Natalie Meisler
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BOULDER — They rank among the biggest playmakers in Colorado football history and turned in some of the biggest plays — "The Catch" in 1994, pitchouts to help beat Nebraska and Oklahoma in 1989, and drawing "The Clip" in the Orange Bowl to preserve the 1990 national championship.

Michael Westbrook and J.J. Flannigan were reunited on their old practice field this weekend at their Future Pro Skills Camp. Ex-Buff Tim James was in town Friday to attend a reception for the camp. There are plans to turn the camp, which concludes today, into a national camp and combine circuit.

All are happy CU is moving to the Pac-10. None are satisfied with the direction of the program since their glory days.

Their common

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bond is playing for coach Bill McCartney. They also share a sense of alienation from the current program.

"It feels like a huge disconnect," said Westbrook, who learned only last week about the 20-year national championship reunion coming up this season. "People have no idea now how CU got so famous."

Flannigan, the ex-running back who was the finisher on spectacular plays that helped defeat Oklahoma and Nebraska, said McCartney brought an attitude of getting the best recruits.

Westbrook agreed.

"He didn't care where the athletes came from,"

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Westbrook said. "He recruited from the best to the worst neighborhoods in a Lincoln Town Car wearing a suit. You'd see this old white guy on a porch, and it was like something out of a movie.

...

"We loved him for it."

Westbrook came from such a neighborhood in Detroit. It made the "Miracle in Michigan," a 64-yard, game-ending Hail Mary catch from Kordell Stewart, all the more special. He autographed stacks of photos for his campers, a history lesson for them, a distant memory for him.

"I'm always asked about it," he said. "I have kids now, and going in the backyard watching them on a trampoline means more than this stuff."

The fourth overall pick by the Redskins in the 1995 draft, Westbrook's NFL career didn't match his collegiate feats.

He had little connection with football after his career ended in 2002. To stay in shape, Westbrook immersed himself in a form of martial arts, then he started coaching his daughter in track. The daughters of Flannigan and Westbrook are high school track teammates outside of Phoenix. The high school's football practice was nearby and he gravitated to helping the wide receivers.

James drew the clipping penalty that nullified the apparent 91-yard punt return for a touchdown by Notre Dame's Rocket Ismail.

"I think the Pac-10 move is a great move with a lot of us from California," said James, a Denver businessman. "We believe we have a promising future."

He said he has the numbers of 200 fellow ex-Buffs in his phone directory but has little communication with the current staff.

During the last 10 years, James said he hasn't met any person as charismatic as McCartney.

"I started 37 straight games for Coach Mac," James said. "I never one time played for myself. I played for Coach Mac. He set the tempo. We all marched to his drum. We bought into his program and never questioned it.


"Nobody stalked the sidelines like Mac. Now I watch games, there's no emotion on the sideline. Mac dictated the tempo to the refs. We got out of Missouri with five downs. How many coaches can make that happen?"

In reference to Nebraska, McCartney banned the color red.

"To this day, I own absolutely nothing in red," James said.

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