

# RINGO: Budget woes not over for Buffaloes

**By Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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University of Colorado leaders have a real problem on their hands when it comes to raising money for the athletic department.

The groundbreaking new Pac-12 Conference media rights deal announced last month has created the perception in some that the department will be flush with cash, free of debt and able to add new programs and build new facilities a year or two from now.

That's far from reality and if the impression is left out there, it could make it much more difficult to raise money. The CU athletic department is funded in three major ways, football revenue, conference distributions and donations. A significant drop in one area could offset gains in another.

Chancellor Phil DiStefano cautioned that the school continues to receive less and less support from the state and that has forced tuition rates up dramatically in recent years. Thus the tuition bill for more than 300 student athletes also has risen dramatically and now accounts for nearly one-sixth of the entire athletic department budget.

"I want to make sure people realize that the increase in funding (from the Pac-12) will certainly help with the operations, but we have a major challenge with our scholarships because we have so many out-of-state student-athletes," DiStefano said. "I think a major priority for us in fundraising is scholarships. Our operations money that we're getting from media really won't help that very much."

The athletic department has been receiving about \$9.5 million annually in recent years from the Big 12 Conference in distributions that come from television appearances, bowl revenue and NCAA basketball tournament money.

CU will begin receiving more than twice that -- about \$21 million -- from the Pac-12 Conference because of its mammoth new television contract with ESPN and Fox.

But Colorado is still two years away from its first big pay day from the Pac-12. CU is joining the league a year earlier than first planned while the conference is still operating under its old media rights deal in 2011-12.

Not only will the Buffs not get a big influx of cash at any time in the next year, they are going to get much less in the 2011-12 school year than they have been getting from the Big 12.

That means more debt. It means things are going to get a little worse before they get better. It means CU actually needs its donors this year more than ever. DiStefano recognizes not every fan has the money to sponsor a scholarship or make four, five and six-digit contributions to athletics.

But he encourages fans to do a better job filling seats in Folsom Field for five home football games this fall.

"It's up to the fans to come out and sell out Folsom stadium every home game," DiStefano said. "That's what we need to do. That will show our coaches and student-athletes the support that has really been lacking for many years here."

DiStefano said he and athletic director Mike Bohn haven't discussed how they will budget the boost in conference distributions when they begin in two years. He said they will meet later this summer and this fall to begin forming a list of priorities.

Both men seem to agree the first step should be paying off debts to the campus and the CU system and, possibly, the Pac-12, and investing in current programs to make sure CU coaches and student-athletes have everything they need to be competitive.

Adding new programs and large-scale facilities projects are at least a few years down the line. Probably closer to 2020 than 2012.

Expanding the Dal Ward Center, building a permanent indoor practice facility for football that can also be used by other programs such as track and field and possibly renovating the Balch Fieldhouse to include more suites would be at or near the top of the list.

Don't hold your breath for a baseball program to be resumed in Boulder any time soon. It might be the 2020s before the Buffs are fielding a team on the diamond again, if ever.

Why? Simple. The team would need a facility that doesn't currently exist and it would add 30-plus male student-athletes and a male coaching staff to a department that already is tilted too heavily to that side of the ledger when looking at it through the Title IX prism.

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