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Bufs4Life aids former Colorado athletes during hard times

By Natalie Meisler
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BROOMFIELD — For just a few hours in the glaring late afternoon sun, Colorado football coach Jon Embree shed the burdens of his office. He was one of the guys again, and that meant a weekend of revelry with fellow former CU players.

This was his moment as co-founder of Bufs4Life. The organization hosts an annual family summer reunion, golf tournament and, above all, fundraiser to help former CU athletes and their families during hard times.

Embree helped form the charity in 2005 to assist former Buffaloes fullback Anthony Weatherspoon, who was battling leukemia, and his family. This week at the Omni Interlocken Resort, they celebrated Sammy Remington's return to health.

Hillary English, the widow of 1988 CU All-America punter Keith English, has been getting support from the group. Embree and English, who died in December of heart disease, were teammates.

"Let me know if you need me to cut your yard, anything," Embree told Hillary.

He asked her children, Madalyn and Easton, how they liked the CU summer basketball and volleyball camps. Bufs4Life took care of the children's camp expenses.

"They said if I ever needed anything, just ask," Hillary English said as her eyes filled with tears. She recalled how she met her husband in Los Angeles during his NFL career and that all he talked about were his CU memories.

Bufs4Life has been helping former CU linebacker Barry Remington for the second year with expenses associated with his daughter Sammy's second heart transplant. The group also extended beyond football to support former CU golfer Brook VanWyk Gillis in her battle against leukemia.

"We have a special bond to all who supported us through difficult times," said Remington, who played at CU from 1982-86. "This is a great way to see people. It's a fabulous program. We feel blessed to be part of it."

Sunday's barbecue and Monday's golf tournament provided the platform for former Bufs to celebrate

getting one of their own as head coach of the football team. Embree played tight end for CU

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from 1983-86 and came back to Boulder as a Buffs assistant coach (1993-2002). After coaching stops at UCLA and with a couple of NFL



CU football coach Jon Embree, a former Buffs player, helped create Buffs4Life. (Aaron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post)

teams, Embree returned again in December as CU's new head coach.

A year ago, many ex-CU players spent the Buffs4Life fundraising weekend lobbying athletic director Mike Bohn for a coaching change.

"When Dan Hawkins was here, he lost the tradition of what Colorado is all about," said Dave Thistle (1983-84), a member of the group's board of directors. "It's a whole 180 (degree turn) since that. That's what Jon is all about."

Former Buffs quarterback Joel Klatt (2002-05), who was an outspoken critic of the Hawkins era, said that unlike a year ago, "There are no cracks. Everyone is pulling in the same direction."

Before their poolside gathering Sunday, about 25 former CU players met and sang the school fight song. Embree said College Football Hall of Famer Alfred Williams, a former CU star, took over the room to emphasize the importance of former players being involved in the program.

"It was great to span the generations," Klatt said. "Everyone was hugging each other."

Klatt said he looks forward to the day when all

former CU quarterbacks welcome Cody Hawkins, Dan's son, into the alumni group. Cody completed his CU career last season.

Several hundred people attended the barbecue, including family members



Robert Herbert, 8, shoots as Myles Purchase, 8, waits for a rebound during the Buffs4Life fundraiser Sunday at the Omni Interlocken Resort. (Aaron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post)

and friends. And "guys who aren't here are donating for Buffs4Life," Embree said.

One of the youngest former CU players in attendance, place-kicker Mason Crosby (2003-06), appeared more interested in showing off his new son (who was wearing a CU football T-shirt)

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than his Green Bay Packers' Super Bowl title ring (big enough to fit on the baby's ankle).

"Obviously we need to do more to get the guys who graduated with me here," Crosby said.

"We're trying to get a younger group and have those guys carry that torch. I'm motivated to be more supportive."

The fundraising effort also drew a combination of CU's past and future. Clay Norgard, the son of former Buffs center Erik Norgard (1987-88), committed to play for CU before his senior year at Mountain Vista. Clay, a linebacker, said of the Buffs4Life event, "I come here every year. It's just like a family."

"It's a dream come true to come back here and have him go to the school I played at," Erik Norgard said.

Future prospects even enjoyed the event. About two dozen kids up to middle-school age tossed a football on a hill near the party.

"What it's really about is seeing all the kids play football together as future Buffs," Embree told the crowd. "It's great when all of our kids can get together, start to know each other and the special bond of being a Buff."

"It's one big family."

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