



CU's football past is important to first-year coach Jon Embree.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Embree Wants His Buffaloes To Remember CU's Past

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COLORADO SPRINGS - University of Colorado football coach Jon Embree wants his first Buffaloes team to be aware of CU's past - not necessarily to repeat it, but to refer to it in establishing its own goals.

"I just want our players to embrace it . . . we have to know who we are and where we're going," Embree said Wednesday at the Colorado Football Kickoff Luncheon, an annual event hosted by the Colorado Springs Sports Corporation.

Also in attendance was Air Force Coach Troy Calhoun, Colorado State-Pueblo Coach John Wristen and first-year Northern Colorado Coach Earnest Collins, Jr. Colorado State was represented by sophomore quarterback Pete Thomas, who filled in for Coach Steve Fairchild.

Embree said all the members of his staff who have CU ties as players have had varied experiences at the school.

"But the bottom line is, we're all done," he said. "I want (current Buffs players) to be able to stand up in front of the team ten years from now when they're done and tell them about their experiences and how it related to the things before them. We need to know about all the great things that have been done here - we've won a Heisman, two Butkuses, two Thorpes, a Mackey, a Davey O'Brien . . .

"We've accomplished some great things here. We've won a national championship, we've played in some of the biggest games in college football history. They need to know that, they need to understand what they're a part of."

Rather than imploring his players to duplicate the past, "I'm just letting them know what their heritage is," Embree said.

Most preseason forecasts haven't been kind to the Buffs, predicting no better than a four- or five-win season, if that, in CU's inaugural year in the Pac-12 Conference. But Embree isn't listening, watching or reading; he's more optimistic than that without putting a number on the W's and L's.

Why the optimism?

"Because I know me," he said. "I know my coaching staff. I believe in those players . . . that they've made unbelievable changes in their habits off the field, the fact that every guy is there this summer working out. I don't think that guarantees anything, but it gives you a chance."

Embree reiterated what he's said several times since spring drills ended - that his first CU team likely won't be the most talented in the nation but adding, "The most talented team doesn't always win - that's why you play the game. These guys will go out and fight and compete and we'll see what happens."

Predicting the Buffs will be better in four years than they will be in his first season "isn't fair to these seniors," Embree added. "What about the guys who won't be here in four years? That's how I look at it."

As for a number of wins in his first year, Embree claimed he doesn't know what would satisfy him or his players. He recounted CU's 1993 campaign under Bill McCartney when the Buffs finished 7-3-1 and McCartney's assistant were moping at season's end.

McCartney, recalled Embree, told his staffers that record was about what he expected and that '94 would be CU's season. He was right; the Buffs finished 11-1, with one sub-par half in their loss at Nebraska preventing them from playing for the national championship.

"That moment always stuck with me, because as coaches and players you sometimes expect certain things," Embree said. "But when you look at it realistically and you're able to see what your talent was (during) the season, how you dealt with injuries and how this or that might have happened, it changes things . . ."

The Buffs are coming off five consecutive losing seasons under Dan Hawkins, including a 5-7 record in his final year.

BUFF BITS: Embree said athletic director Mike Bohn has consulted him about future scheduling. "He's been good about it . . . but I've been thinking about Hawaii (CU opens at Hawaii on Sept. 3)," Embree said. As for scheduling perceived "cupcakes," he pointed out that the Buffs lost to Montana State in their opener five seasons ago. "You've got to play whoever they put out there . . . I just want to build Colorado. You've got to be excited about whoever you play; you've got to treat every (opponent) like they mean something." . . . Senior quarterback Tyler Hansen "isn't one of the leaders on this team, he is THE leader," Embree said . . . Embree doesn't expect any more player attrition before players report for preseason camp on Aug. 3. He added that the only player who could be in jeopardy for the opener due to injury is tailback Brian Lockridge (ankle) . . . Embree called 2011 "very good" for high school football in Colorado. "It's a good crop from a collegiate standpoint." . . . Calhoun believes CU will be successful in the Pac-12 - and Embree takes that as high praise. "I think the world of Troy," he said. "I have a great relationship with Gary Kubiak (former Broncos assistant, Texans head coach) and Mike (Shanahan, Denver/Washington) and I know how they feel about him. They've worked with him and I've watched him from afar and know what he's done at the Academy. It's a real unique situation; I don't know how they do it from a recruiting standpoint (and) the demands that are put on them."

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SHOW MENU

CU football notes: UNC Bears want to play regional foes

By Joshua Linden Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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COLORADO SPRINGS -- If you're a small Division-I football program looking to raise your profile, the formula is clear and often emulated: Play the big boys on TV to gain exposure and score a much-needed payday for your athletic department.

The blueprint is one Northern Colorado has followed in recent years since the Bears' move up from Division II to the Football Championship Subdivision of Division I.

UNC has played at Football Bowl Subdivision schools Michigan State and Kansas in recent years and has in-state rival Colorado State on the docket this season.

First-year coach Earnest Collins Jr., said at Wednesday's Colorado Football Kickoff Luncheon that his squad has future dates with the likes of Utah and Wyoming scheduled, and that his team would be happy to land a game in Boulder against the Colorado Buffaloes if the opportunity arose.

So could the Bears be coming to Boulder any time soon?

Colorado has historically refrained from scheduling many opponents from Division I's lower tier, opting instead to go after home and home series with prominent foes. But the shift to the Pac-12 Conference this year -- and the move to a nine-game league schedule that comes with it -- could leave CU in a tricky spot.

Some years, the Buffs will have four conference home games and other years five. They also have a neutral-site game with CSU through 2019. To get to six true home games -- the school's usual goal -- in a 12-game season, there would be years where the Buffs need both of their remaining non-conference games to be at home. That means locking in some opponents for 2-for-1 series or landing home games against foes who don't require a return trip -- typically FCS schools.

"I really haven't worried about it really," first-year CU coach Jon Embree said of his preferences as it relates to scheduling, which is handled primarily by athletic director Mike Bohn. "All I've been thinking about is (season-opening foe) Hawaii."

"We did lose to Montana State a few years ago, right?" Embree added with regard to the prospect of facing UNC or another FCS foe. "So you've got to play every week no matter who they put out there."

Embree pointed to the rapid rise of schools like TCU and the years-in-advance nature of college football scheduling as reasoning for his rationale.

"To sit here and say six years from now I want to play School X, be careful what you wish for right?" Embree said. "I can't worry about who's on the schedule."

CU pipeline

Embree isn't the only head coach in the state with plenty of CU ties on his coaching staff.

CSU-Pueblo head coach John Wristen -- a former CU assistant under Gary Barnett -- has built a winner out of the Thunderwolves the last three years with a heavy complement of former CU players and coaches on staff.

CSU-P defensive coordinator Hunter Hughes is a former CU grad assistant. Quarterbacks coach Mike Babcock was a CU coaching intern. Defensive backs coach Donnell Leomiti is a former CU player and coaching intern. Former Buff tight end and fullback Paul Creighton is the T-wolves' defensive line coach. And former Buff quarterback Bernard Jackson -- CSU-P's leading receiver last season as a senior -- has been hired to coach receivers this fall, replacing former CU receiver Dusty Sprague in the role.

"They call us CU South because of all the connections on the coaching staff," Wristen said.

Ready to go

Embree said running back Brian Lockridge (ankle) might be the only injured player at risk of missing the season opener against Hawaii, adding that players like Parker Orms and Anthony Perkins (knees) should be "full speed ahead."

Embree did confirm that running back Rashad Hall, a member of the incoming freshman class, will not be joining the team due to academic issues.

"Everyone else should be good to go," Embree said of his first recruiting class.

Holding court

Embree had the crowd at Wednesday's luncheon laughing on multiple occasions.

On seeing fellow head coaches Troy Calhoun (Air Force), Collins and Wristen on the recruiting trail often: "We need to start bringing our golf clubs. We can get a little foursome going."

On backup quarterback Nick Hirschman performing well in the CU spring game: "He kept saying, 'I'm a game-time guy, I'm a game-time guy,' because he looks kind of shaky sometimes in practice. And I didn't want to wait until game time and find out he was wrong. So it was good to get him out there and see, 'OK, he might be right a little bit.'"

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college football

University of Colorado eagerly awaiting move to Pac-12, football coach Jon Embree says

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post

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COLORADO SPRINGS — University of Colorado football coach Jon Embree couldn't help but take one last swipe at the Big 12 Conference.

Speaking at a football luncheon Wednesday sponsored by the Colorado Springs Sports Corp., Embree said the Buffaloes will be going from the "Little Apple to Los Angeles."

Kansas State is located in Manhattan, the "Little Apple" of the Big 12. CU is done playing conference games there.

By leaving the Big 12 and joining the Pac-12 on Friday, CU will play conference games in Los Angeles against UCLA and Southern California.

"It's exciting," Embree said. "I've been in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Phoenix and Washington with some (CU) alumni groups. We have so many alumni out there who are excited about us coming out there."

Embree, a former CU tight end, is entering his first season as the Buffaloes' head coach.

"I think the players are starting to embrace where we want to be from the standpoint of an identity and a standard," Embree said. "It came about in spring football. We tried to practice at a pace that they understood if it wasn't right, we'd go back and do it again."

Embree said his biggest challenge has been changing the attitude of the team.

"We've had some players leave the program for one reason or another," he said. "I feel good about the players we have. They understand what we want. They understand how to work. They need to know about the great things this university has done. We've won a Heisman Trophy, a national championship, and we've played in some of the greatest games in college football history. I want them to know what their heritage is."

Embree said injured tailback Brian Lockridge may return to practice in CU's August camp.

Speakers at the luncheon included Air Force coach Troy Calhoun, Northern Colorado's Earnest Collins Jr. and CSU-Pueblo's John Wristen. Colorado State quarterback Pete Thomas

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represented the Rams because coach Steve Fairchild had a scheduling conflict.

"When you go into a new environment, you have to learn the terrain," Calhoun said of Embree and the Buffs. "They have all the makings of having a top-20 football program and they will real soon."

Calhoun is eagerly awaiting the opening in late July of Air Force's new indoor practice facility. He said the privately funded Holaday Athletic Center (92,000 square feet) will lift AFA facilities to the level of other major-college athletic departments on the Front Range.

Wristen and CSU-Pueblo have seniors on the roster for the first time since the Division II program was restored.

Collins, a former UNC player, is entering his first season as the Bears' head coach.

Thomas said he plans to take CSU's offensive linemen to dinner again after the season, but hopefully for a smaller price.

"The (first) bill was more than I thought it would be," said Thomas, who will be entering his sophomore season. "I had to get some money from my mom to pay the bill."

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RAMSEY: CU's Embree hopes to lift downtrodden Buffs

[DAVID RAMSEY](#)

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OPINION
DAVID RAMSEY
Gazette Sports columnist

Jon Embree wants to talk about the distant past, which makes sense.

His Colorado Buffaloes have lost 18 of their last 24 conference football games while tumbling out of favor in their namesake state.

Yes, it's true; the Buffs ruled college football in 1990 as national champs.

But this is true, too: In 2011, the Buffs will be, at best, the state's second-best college football team behind Air Force.

This explains why Embree talks to his players about CU's Rashaan Salaam and his 1994 journey to the Heisman Trophy. Or why he talks about the mega talents of Michael Westbrook and Alfred Williams. Or about CU's 58 wins in six seasons from 1989 to 1994.

Embree, preparing for his first season as coach, is straining to lift his Buffaloes to a new era. He's trying to push his downtrodden players to dream big.

"You need to know about the great things this university has done," Embree said Wednesday after the annual College Football Kickoff Luncheon at the Colorado Springs Marriott. "We've accomplished great things, played in some of the biggest games in college football history.

"They need to know that. They need to understand what they're a part of."

But will all this talk about the glories of yesteryear be inspiring?

Or intimidating?

Embree walks a perilous path. The Buffs are so stuck in the past that senior citizen Bill McCartney, who retired in 1994, was considered a viable candidate for the coaching vacancy Embree filled.

This is a program that desperately needs good times right now. It's a program that shredded the coaching career of Dan Hawkins, not long ago the hottest young coaching prospect in the nation. Hawkins arrived in Boulder as a bubbly, full-of-life optimist. He departed snarling, weary and conquered.

There's one thing virtually everyone agrees on: Those good times will not arrive in the immediate future.

Embree has heard whispers about the horrors that await the Buffaloes as they head into their first season in the Pac-12.

"We're supposed to be 2-11," he said, shaking his head with disgust.

He's smart enough to stay away from specific predictions. He's not the type to boldly defy his critics and promise a breakout 10-win season.

"We're not the most talented team," Embree said, "and I'm OK with that."

CU has a few patches of real talent. Quarterback Tyler Hansen is a highly accurate passer who must learn to take risks. Rodney Stewart will be one of the Pac-12's top running backs. Ryan Miller is a powerful, and gigantic, offensive tackle.

But that's about it. The defense, which allowed 25 points or more nine times last season, is again porous. The Buffs travel to Ohio State and Stanford, where massively bad times surely await. Sure, 2-11 might be a little pessimistic; 3-10 sounds about right.

These obstacles have led to mass gloom in Boulder. Many college coaches work diligently to lower expectations. High expectations often lead to unemployment.

Embree has the opposite trouble.

"Everybody comes up to me like I'm going to a funeral this year," he said, laughing. "I hear, 'Hey, coach, we're not expecting anything for seven years.'"

Embree's smile faded.

"Wait," he said. "I don't believe in that."

And with good reason. He can't believe in that.

Embree knows he must deliver in the future. He knows his current players can't wait anywhere close to seven years for a revival.

He knows the time will come, and soon, when he must transform from Mr. Yesterday to Mr. Tomorrow.



Calhoun sympathizes with first-year head coaches

[FRANK SCHWAB](#)

2011-06-29 19:52:01



Without having to reach for his calendar, new Colorado football coach Jon Embree can list every day he has had off since taking the Buffaloes' job.

"Christmas," Embree said, having no other days to add.

Air Force coach Troy Calhoun remembers being a first-year head coach like Embree. Days off are rare for any football coach, even one in his fifth season like Calhoun, but that first year is probably the

toughest. At the Colorado Springs *Sports Corporation's* Football Kickoff Luncheon on Wednesday, Calhoun was up on stage with a couple of coaches who are in their first year on the job: Embree and Northern Colorado coach Earnest Collins.

He knows what they're going through.

"I think the biggest thing, is you have to run hard with whatever your foresight and plan is, and go full tilt with it," Calhoun said. "The things you know you do fairly well, it's OK to keep heading in that direction and take that train and push it full steam ahead."

Calhoun said when he started, he had to learn about everything that had changed at Air Force since he left, something Embree and Collins (who are also coaching at their alma maters) are dealing with too. And Calhoun was trying to put his mark on all parts of the program, from hiring a staff to recruiting, and he even mentioned that he studied the traffic flow into Falcon Stadium to help maximize the fan experience. That's an issue Calhoun still thinks about.

Embree has had plenty of things to worry about during his first few months as head coach. One, for example, was academics. He said 24 CU football players had a grade-point average under 2.0 when he took the job, and he instituted a 6:45 a.m. study table for the players, run by the coaches. Embree said just two players had GPAs under a C average this spring. He's spending a lot of time simply changing the culture at CU.

"It's creating that standard of how you do things every day," Embree said.

Calhoun has established a culture of winning at Air Force, after four bowl appearances in four seasons. This could be his best team yet.

"We've had four really, really, really good seasons, and yet it'll also be kind of fun to see what happens in the future, too," Calhoun said.

Air Force and Colorado have their own unique challenges, but Embree said he "thinks the world of Troy," and thinks Air Force is a good model for some of the things he wants to accomplish at Colorado, especially when it comes to establishing an identity for Buffaloes football.

"That's what I mean, knowing who you are - Air Force, how they recruit, how their players play, how they coach them, they know," Embree said. "That's what we have to get up in Colorado."