



Athletic Director Mike Bohn has a Plan B for Buffs hoops.
Photo Courtesy: Glenn Asakawa, University of Colorado



03/03/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: CU Takes 'Aggressive' Aim At NIT (Just In Case)

SUPERIOR - However unlikely after Wednesday night's disappointing loss at Iowa State, Plan A remains the NCAA Tournament for the Colorado men's basketball team. But if the Buffs must go to Plan B for postseason play, athletic department officials already have begun lobbying for inclusion in the NIT, as well as the WNIT for the surprising CU women's team.

Athletic Director Mike Bohn said Thursday that "significant and aggressive bids" have been made to host both the NIT and the WNIT "if that's the path we go down." Early rounds in both are played at campus sites, and Bohn said the school is "reaching out to both tournaments," emphasizing a peaking interest in CU men's hoops that already has produced a record four sellouts this season at the Coors Events Center.

A fifth men's sellout will occur Saturday at 7:05 p.m. when Nebraska visits for the final Big 12 Conference game in Boulder. At 2 p.m., the CU women play No. 3 Baylor at the Events Center. In appreciation of the fan/student support this season, Bohn said 14,000 white T-shirts - it's a "White Out" day - will be distributed to attendees at both games.

Bohn said handing out T-shirts "is a way to say, 'Thank you.' It's an effort to further demonstrate the unity built between the team, the coaching staff, the fans and the students that are making such a big difference."

Saturday's men's game will be broadcast on KOA, the first time that's been done since 1982-83, thanks to new station manager Greg Foster and play-by-play announcer Mark Johnson.

At next week's Big 12 tournament, Bohn said another T-shirt giveaway is planned. CU will distribute T-shirts "saluting our 15 years in the league," he said, adding that Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe has been "supportive in so many ways . . . we salute him and his staff, as well as all of my colleagues in the Big 12 for their professionalism, support and collaboration with us. It's been terrific."

Following Saturday's games, CU has only six Big 12 athletic events - all tennis matches - remaining to be played in Boulder.

Women's Coach Linda Lappe and her staff are hopeful that at least 5,000 fans show up for their game against the Bears and 6-foot-8 Brittney Griner - currently the most recognizable player in women's college basketball. With their 64-61 Wednesday night win at Nebraska, the CU women moved to 15-13 overall (6-9 conference) and also assured themselves of a winning record entering the Big 12 tournament. Lappe's team has found a late-season spark, fashioning a three-game winning streak that includes back-to-back road victories.

Saturday's game finds her team in a "no pressure" situation. "It should be a fun night for us - alumni night, senior night," Lappe said. "We have a ranked team again in our building. We just have to attack this game like every other home game. The pressure's not on us; we should have fun and do what we need to do in order to compete . . . but at the same time, we also know we have a bigger picture as well.

"It's almost kind of a perfect storm . . . the only thing better might be if Baylor was ranked No. 1. It's fitting and it should be a great environment."

She lauded CU fans for their knowledge and enthusiasm, saying a crowd of 5,000 would provide the energy of twice that many for her team. "They don't come out and sit on their hands," she said.

A 95-90 loss at Iowa State dropped the CU men a game below .500 (7-8) in the Big 12 and out of most NCAA Tournament projections. But at 18-12 overall, they're assured of a winning record - an NIT prerequisite - going into next week's Big 12 postseason tournament in Kansas City.

Both CU teams' last postseason appearances were in the NIT and WNIT, respectively, with the men playing in the 2006 NIT, the women in the 2008 WNIT.

"The probability of both teams getting into the postseason, whichever tournament it is, is very, very high," Bohn said. "That's exciting for us. I think both new coaches have seized the opportunity and done a great job. I think they've both faced some adversity, if you will, at different times in the season and I think they've handled that with incredible poise and resilience and a great competitive spirit. I'm thrilled with what they're doing."

CROWDED HOUSE AT THE CEC: Fans have made this a memorable - and record-setting - season for men's hoops. Saturday's Senior Night game will mark a record fifth sellout in the 32-year-old Events Center, which seats 11,064. The previous record was two sellouts in several seasons.

CU also will set school records for conference attendance, averaging about 9,800 and breaking the previous mark of 9,417 in 1983-84 (Jay Humphries' senior season), and overall single-game attendance, averaging about 6,900. Single game attendance has been higher in only two seasons - 7,659 in '83-'84 and 6,915 in '82-'83.

Also, an overall attendance mark will be set, with that figure topping 117,000 (old mark: 114,887 in '83-'84).

With the surge in men's home attendance, Bohn said CU has "exceeded our budgeted ticket revenue for men's and women's basketball significantly - that helps."

Still, neither program is operating in the black. "When you factor in all expenditures associated with it, it has been (in the red)," Bohn said. "We're making progress in that, but our basketball enterprise is collectively - even with those sellouts - is not there yet."

Bohn said CU's is the only basketball program in the Big 12 or the Pac-12 that does not have a donor seating component similar to that in football.

"It's obviously something we have to look at," he said. "We're not saying we're going to do it, but we're going to look at it . . . we're not generating a surplus, if you will, of profitability in either one of those sports. But that's obviously why we're making the significant investments in those sports, to help with that."

WHERE'S THE 'D'? That was Tad Boyle's question in the aftermath of his team's trip to Ames, Iowa. "You give up 95 points . . . it's just not good enough," he said. "We've got to get better at the little things. You score 90 on the road, you should win. You score 90 at home, you should win."

The defensive killer, he said, was the Buffs allowing the Cyclones 32 trips to the rim and converting 24 of those into layups.

His approach on Thursday was "going to back to square one . . . we've had to do it in the past; we've had some disappointing losses. We're going to watch film and try to learn from our mistakes. That's all you can do as a coach - go back to your basics and do what you believe in."

EXTRA NIGHT IN PARADISE: That depends on your definition of paradise. The CU women spent an extra night in Lincoln after their charter plane developed de-icing problems that were discovered before takeoff. An option was busing back to Boulder, but upon further review, Lappe decided to check her traveling party back into their Lincoln hotel and wait until the plane was repaired. They departed with no issues on Thursday morning, arriving at 7:45 a.m. at Rocky Mountain Regional Airport in Broomfield.

UPTICK IN FOOTBALL TICKET SALES: Bohn said over 500 new customers have made deposits for 2011 season football tickets and that the school's goal is to top 25,000 season tickets sold. The customer average per ticket is roughly 2.5, Bohn said.

Last season's football season ticket total was about 21,000. CU's record for season ticket sales was over 30,000 in 1976.

The recent surge in sales, said Bohn, is "a tribute to us joining the Pac-12 and getting people excited from Day 1 to enjoy seeing new teams and being part of this new era."

Another factor: The interest generated by new head coach Jon Embree and his staff, which includes former Buffs Eric Bieniemy (offensive coordinator/running backs) and Kanavis McGhee (defensive ends/outside linebackers) and several other assistants familiar to Buffs fans. Bohn said Embree has assembled "a quality staff."

CU's football season ticket prices for 2011 are based on a six-game package - five games to be played at Folsom Field and the Sept. 17 contest against Colorado State at Invesco Field at Mile High. Prices in 2010 were based on a seven-game package - six games at Folsom, plus the CSU game in Denver.

Bohn said the CSU game is scheduled to be CU's opener in most seasons, with the exception of 2015, when the Buffs once again will open the season in Hawaii and play 13 games.

(See story headlined "Colorado Announces Season Ticket Prices, Schedule" on CUBuffs.com website)

CU-CSU TICKET PLAN: The ticket procedure for the 2011 CU-CSU game, to be played Sept. 17 in Denver, also remains unchanged. Season ticket holders seated in Invesco Field at Mile High's stadium bowl are opted into \$55 upper level seats, but can upgrade to the lower level if they choose. Season ticket holders whose seats are on Folsom's East Side Club, Flatirons Club and West Side Covered are opted into \$110 club level seats at Invesco, but have the option to downgrade.

The Buffs' 2011 games at Folsom Field (53,613 capacity) include a Sept. 10 date against future Pac-12 Conference member California. It will not count as a league game. After CU played at Cal last season, losing 52-7, there was discussion by both schools about scheduling another opponent and averting a situation that Pac-10/12 Commissioner Larry Scott termed "a little awkward."

Speaking with the media prior to a Denver recruiting luncheon in January, Scott called the CU-Cal game "problematic in different respects." He confirmed at the time that the game - if played as scheduled - would not count in the league

standings, calling that scenario "a little awkward . . . but if it happens, I'd just chalk it up to one of those transition issues that you have to deal with when the conference expands."

The Buffs' 2011 home schedule includes games against Cal (Sept. 10), Washington State (Oct. 1, homecoming), Oregon (Oct. 22, Family Weekend), Southern California (Nov. 5) and Arizona (Nov. 12). CU opens the 2011 season with a Sept. 3 trip to Hawaii.

A formative member of the Big 12 Conference in 1996, CU will join Utah as members of the expanded Pac-10 for the 2011 season. The new Pac-12 logo will be formally unveiled on March 16, following the Pac-10 basketball tournament.

Bohn said the decision to play the CU-Cal game was mutual by both schools. Reasons on CU's end to play it as scheduled included a visit by another "high quality" opponent to Folsom in a season that features only five home games, and the fact that Cal and Stanford - by virtue of Pac-12 scheduling - are two of the teams that CU will play infrequently.

KUDOS TO THE FORMER MS. BARRINGER: Former CU All-America/Beijing Olympian Jenny (Barringer) Simpson ran a new world-leading mile time of 4:28.60 in January in New York. Simpson, also the American record-holder in the 3,000-meter steeplechase, had taken seven months off to recuperate from a hip injury. After her final year of competition for CU in 2010, she signed a professional contract with New Balance and was married last October. Bohn called her "the consummate competitor and champion . . . we couldn't be prouder that she's a former Buff."

PAST FOOTBALL TEAMS TO BE HONORED: CU's 1961 and 2001 football teams, which will be honored on a pair of Saturdays this fall. The '61 team won the Big Eight Conference championship in its first year (it had previously been the Big Seven) and played in the Orange Bowl, while the '01 team delivered the school's only Big 12 football championship. The '61 squad will be honored at the Washington State game on Oct. 1, the '01 squad at the Cal game on Sept. 10.

BASKETBALL/VOLLEYBALL FACILITY ON SCHEDULE: The \$10.8-million basketball/volleyball practice facility being constructed adjacent to the Coors Events Center. The 35,000-square foot building is on target for an August completion. "We're fired up and excited and can't wait for the opportunity to get into it," Bohn said. "We'll have a dedication ceremony announced in the near future."

He also acknowledged the fans' patience in negotiating the construction, which began last spring and has continued throughout the men's and women's season. "They've been fantastic in dealing with that; it hasn't been the easiest thing," Bohn said.

Among the biggest benefits of the new facility will be coaches not having to stagger practice times with only one available court. That also should translate into an academic benefit for the student-athletes in resolving their class schedules.

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SHOW MENU

