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## Buffaloes moving in right direction

By Brian Howell  
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**SUPERIOR** — During the past 12 months, has there been a busier athletic director than Colorado's Mike Bohn?

"I'd like to believe we work pretty hard," he said with a smile on Thursday. "Our passion is high and our commitment is high and we're having fun."

If Bohn looks and sounds a little different than he did just a few months ago, it's no secret why.

A year ago at this time, the Buffs were dealing with pressure to fire head football coach Dan Hawkins and answering questions about the job status of women's basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller. Not long after that, the Buffs saw men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik leave the program.

Then came the uncertainty of CU's future and the future of the Big 12 Conference.

"It's really been a roller-coaster of incredible highs and other challenges," Bohn said of the past year.

Without question, the CU athletic department has found some calmer waters. The Buffs now seem to be sailing in the right direction.

McConnell-Miller was fired at the end of the 2009-10 women's basketball season. She was replaced by former Buffaloes player Linda Lappe.

Bzdelik bolted for Wake Forest. In his place, Bohn hired Colorado native (and former Longmont High coach) Tad Boyle.

Over the summer, the Buffs handled the Big 12 storm by finding a (presumably) sweeter deal to join the Pac-12.

Then Hawkins was fired in November, much to the delight of many CU fans. He was replaced by Jon Embree, a former CU player who has already injected some new life into the program.

All the while, construction on the new basketball/volleyball practice facility is sailing along. The Buffs are eager to get into those new digs as soon as possible.

The past 12 months have been a unique period of time for the school. This is the first time in CU history that it has hired new coaches in football, men's basketball and women's basketball in the same 12-month period. In fact, this is just the fifth time in the past 100 years that CU has hired a head football coach and men's head basketball coach in the same 12-month period (also in 1918, 1935, 1981-82 and 1995).

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Time will tell how the Embree and Pac-12 moves will turn out.

But Lappe has led the women's team to postseason eligibility for the first time in three years. The Buffs are likely to receive a bid to the WNIT.

Boyle has the men's team in position to earn a postseason berth — likely the NIT — for the first time in five years.

The last time both basketball teams qualified for postseason play was in 2003-04.

No wonder Bohn is excited about the CU program.

“Any time you need to make a change in coaches and have so many different opportunities, it's a challenge,” he said. “Yet it's been so fulfilling to see Tad and Linda do just a great job, and seeing Jon pull the (football coaching) staff together the way he did; to see our board of regents, the chancellor and president unanimously support the Pac-12. Those are all real highlights.”

There are certainly challenges ahead.

The move to the Pac-12 could cost the Buffs a total of about \$15 million in revenue from this school year and the next.

Another \$2.1 million is headed to Hawkins to buy out the rest of his contract. And the school recently announced that it will pay McConnell-Miller an additional \$371K to settle her contract.

Bohn and his staff are finding ways — and will continue to search for more — to make up for those financial losses.

On the field, Embree still has to prove he can turn the football team into a winner, while Boyle and Lappe need to find sustained success.

Yet the outlook for the CU athletic program looks better today than it did a year ago, Bohn said.

“Absolutely. No question,” he said. “I don't want to disrespect anyone, but it's probably 180 degrees different. The media is talking about things, good and bad, because of the interest. (We have) tremendous coaches — coaches with great passion, great integrity.

“Our future is bright. We're excited. Our fans are excited, donors are excited, the media is excited.

“Now we just need to keep moving forward and keep doing some good things — try to avoid too many highs and too many lows.”

That's the next challenge for Bohn. And as busy as he has been during the past 12 months, he's sure to be just as busy in the next 12.

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