

CU Buffs coach Jon Embree at home with Pac-12 peers

CU football coach enjoys first meeting with Pac-12 coaches

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Funny is the word Colorado football coach Jon Embree used to describe the first meeting of Pac-12 football coaches earlier this month in Arizona at what used to be the Fiesta Frolic, an annual gathering for college coaches sponsored by the Fiesta Bowl.

Embree said Arizona State coach Dennis Erickson "reluctantly" seemed to be the Godfather of the Pac-12 group but Oregon's Chip Kelly, whose team lost to Auburn in the national title game in January, and Cal coach Jeff Tedford also commanded plenty of respect.

Embree said he felt right at home in the room because he had previous relationships with more than half the coaches in the league, including Kelly, Tedford, Arizona coach Mike Stoops, Washington coach Steve Sarkisian, USC coach Lane Kiffin and former CU head coach Rick Neuheisel, now the head man at UCLA. Embree coached under Neuheisel in Boulder in the 1990s.

"I just wanted to watch the dynamics of it and kind of see how guys interacted with each other," Embree said. "It was fun because you watch who says what in the meetings and who kind of tries to run it, you know, who is the Godfather?"

Embree said because he was one of two first-year coaches in the room and CU also is a new school in the league, he opted to listen more than speak.

He said part of the reason he didn't chime in more often about how certain issues affect CU is because he still isn't certain of those answers at this point after less than six months on the job. He will probably have a much better feel next spring.

Embree said Utah coach Kyle Whittingham seemed to take the same approach. Whittingham isn't a first-year head coach like Embree, but he is one of two other new coaches in the expanded league along with Stanford coach David Shaw.

Coaches discussed a variety of issues, including on-field rule changes, and off-the-field changes, such as a new NCAA rule under which players who fail to pass nine credit hours during the fall quarter or semester will be suspended for the first four games of the following season.

Under the rule, players will have a one-time get out of jail free card during their five-year window of eligibility and they can also have the penalty reduced to two games as long as they meet certain academic requirements before the start of the next season.

Embree said Pac-12 coaches were not in favor of that particular rule.

"That didn't really make sense," he said.

Embree marveled at how nothing seemed to affect Stanford, the only private institution in the conference.

"We talked about some substitution things and that was funny because basically guys were just complaining about Stanford and Oregon and how they do it snapping the ball and running people on and off," Embree said.

Embree was also amused at how Mike Stoops would speak any time there was an issue discussed that seemed to favor the defense. Stoops has built a strong reputation over the years as one of the best defensive coaches in the nation.

"It was funny," Embree said. "It was just an interesting dynamic."

Embree said there was a lot of camaraderie in the group. He credited several of the veteran coaches in the conference -- Neuheisel and Kelly primarily -- for being mentors to him and always taking his calls any time he has had a question about an issue or just wanted to get a fellow head coach's perspective during his first five months on the job.

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