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Paige: Colorado strikes it rich with Mike Bohn

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

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Robert De Niro, Steven Spielberg, Meryl Streep, Natalie Portman, George Clooney, Bond . . . James Bond . . . and Ralphie the Buffalo.

The Buffs are going Hollywood, but athletic director Mike Bohn remains all Colorado.

The University of Colorado is developing an agreement with Creative Artists Agency, the powerful Los Angeles-based entertainment and sports representation company, to assist in branding and expanding the Buffaloes' sports future, Bohn says.

Larry Scott, commissioner of the soon-to-be Pac-12 Conference, and CAA negotiated a 12-year, \$3 billion network TV deal, the most lucrative in college sports history.

CU will receive \$20.8 million in the first year of the contract, which increases 5 percent annually, and approximately \$33 million in 2023. Colorado also will get a full share in a new Pac-12 Network TV package. The Buffs earned less than \$9 million from television revenues in its final year in the Big 12.

Good move, Mike.

Bohn, the CU athletic director, was beaming Saturday morning. A year ago this month, he was scowling. University of Missouri officials met to

discuss a potential switch from the Big 12 to the Big Ten, and Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon publicly and earnestly endorsed the transfer, terming the Big Ten an upgrade.

"The governor's remarks got me going. We had to do something, and fast," Bohn told me over a wholesome breakfast — pastrami sandwiches — at the New York Deli News in Denver. The Pac-10 had hired former Big 12 commissioner Kevin Weiberg as chief operating officer. Bohn and Weiberg fast-tracked private talks, and the Buffaloes announced intentions in mid-June to join the Pac-10. The next day, Nebraska turned to the Big Ten. Missouri was left behind.

Bohn, only the fifth full-time AD in CU history, was sitting uncomfortably in his scorching office chair early in 2010.

In 2005, he took over an insolvent program of ill repute in disrepair.

The football team had been badly damaged by scandal, the men's basketball team was dreadful, and the athletic department had borrowed millions to pay off fired coaches' salaries.

"I found out there was \$3 million in back football ticket sales that never had been collected," Bohn



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says.

The dire situation was exacerbated by Bohn's poor choices in coaches — Dan Hawkins, Jeff Bzdelik and Kathy McConnell-Miller, who combined couldn't win 40 percent of their games (120-185, with only one winning season — by the women's basketball coach).

Bohn fired two last year, and Bzdelik departed for Wake Forest.

There was clamoring for Bohn to be dismissed.

But I maintained faith in Bohn. We met in 1984 when he was a kid intern at the Air Force Academy. — His family had moved to Colorado from Illinois when Mike was 1, and he played high school football and baseball in Boulder (and at Kansas). He would become assistant athletic director with the Falcons, associate athletic director with the Rams and — after pauses with other schools and the Big Sky Conference — Bohn returned to his hometown.

The 50-year-old Bohn is the hardest-working man in the college sports business, and he's pulled off an admirable turnaround for CU and for himself.

CU is on a positive course in football and back in basketball — and soon will be in the black financially.

Bohn hired former Buffs athlete Linda Lappe and ex-Colorado prep star Tad Boyle as basketball coaches. The women's team finished 18-16 and reached the WNIT quarterfinals. The men's team had a 24-14 record and made it to the NIT semifinals.

Jon Embree, who played at Cherry Creek and Colorado, was named football coach and has seven assistants with Colorado connections. There already is a fresh mood and a new discipline on the football team, and ex-coach Bill McCartney is involved actively again. Now, the

Buff's need more quality players.

Bohn, who orchestrated all the right moves and the most important move — to the Pac-10 — notices his chair seat has cooled considerably.

"The chancellor, the faculty rep, our athletic department and our big boosters (read: richest donors) are on the same page. We've put together a master plan of how we will accomplish our vision."

In the tale of one school, it had been the worst of times, and it could be the best of times.

"But we're not there yet," Bohn said. "Our second highest number of alumni lives in California (23,000). Last year we had 99 in Buffs boosters clubs. That's risen to 500. The TV contract has been so important, but it's not the end-all. We need more people to embrace the Buffs, and we must be competitive in the Pac-10 in all our sports.

"That's why we're enlisting the help of CAA in social media, other projects and our master plan."

And, perhaps, Ralphie will be given a starring role in a movie with other CAA clients Nicole Kidman, David Beckham, Peyton Manning and



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Thorburn: TV revenue shouldn't be used to add CU Buffs teams

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Larry Scott can certainly play hardball.

The visionary Pac-10 Commissioner has negotiated a television deal for the soon-to-be expanded conference reportedly worth \$3 billion over 12 years.

That divides to a cool \$21 million annually for Colorado in the Pac-12 beginning with the 2012-13 season, which is more than twice as much as the athletic department has been receiving as a member of the Big 12.

With suddenly greener pastures on the horizon, a lot of Buffs fans are thinking about baseball again. Specifically, when is CU going to resume playing America's favorite pastime?

The answer: Not anytime soon.

Mike Bohn, who almost had as good a week as the Navy Seals, knows CU's good fortunes can't be squandered on more non-revenue sports at this time.

The extra cash flow will help the athletic director pay for past mistakes (the loan for Gary Barnett's buyout/hiring Hawk-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named/settling the recruiting scandal lawsuit and the H-W-M-N-B-N buyout), make up the 4-to-9 percent increases on scholarships after the regents voted to raise tuition and cover some expensive moving costs (the Big 12 exit fee, higher fuel costs for travel) during the transition from the poorhouse to the penthouse.

Perhaps in five or 10 years, the Buffs will be able to think about running out of a dugout and onto a field of dreams.

Thanks to the move to the Pac-12, bringing collegiate baseball back to Boulder some day is at least a possibility. Colorado State and Wyoming -- who have also dropped beloved baseball programs -- will never be in position to get them back with the Mountain West's current TV deal (a little over a million bucks per institution) unless a wealthy donor(s) wanted to pay the freight.

Bohn deserves a lot of credit for making sure CU had a nice seat during last summer's high-stakes game of musical chairs. The guy shouldn't have to buy a drink at alumni functions from Pullman to Phoenix, Seattle to San Francisco, or Berkeley to Boulder going forward.

But before seriously considering adding more sports, the Buffs need to focus on getting good at the games they already play.

Starting with the one everybody cares about -- football.

Hiring Jon Embree was a positive first step down this long road. Making sure the talented new staff is paid market value and has the recruiting budget to compete with top-tier Pac-12 programs will be critical in order to maintain consistency.

In 2010, USC's Lane Kiffin reportedly made \$4 million. Oregon's Chip Kelly made \$2.4 million and is probably due a raise. Only current Pac-10 Washington State's Paul Wulff (\$600,650) makes less than \$1 million. And the Cougars have been getting what they've paid for on the scoreboard.

Embree? The loyal Buff was willing to take less money (about \$725,000 in base salary per season) so Bohn could boost the salary pool for top assistants like Eric Bieniemy, Greg Brown and Brian Cabral.

If this group were to get CU to a Rose Bowl, the hometown discount might not apply anymore. Same story for Tad Boyle should the Buffs take advantage of the program's recent momentum and new practice facility by making a run to the Sweet 16 in a few years.

Is it outrageous for college coaches to be making these types of salaries? Not when ESPN and Fox are willing to peel of \$3 billion for the rights to broadcast high-quality football and basketball.

Big-time college sports have never been more popular or more in demand. In a down economy, sometimes we just want to be entertained. And thanks to the Pac-12's new deal fans won't have to miss any games (as long as they can afford a cable or satellite package that includes ABC, ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, Fox, Fox Sports Net and the Pac-12 Network).

A number of sports CU already funds that are largely ignored by the media and fans -- including Mark Wetmore's highly successful cross country and track programs -- will also be getting more exposure via the Pac-12's planned digital network.

Several CU programs that have been floundering at the bottom of the Big 12 standings or underachieving on the road don't have much time to step their games up. The Pac-10 has been dominant nationally in golf, soccer, tennis and volleyball.

Scott said this of the record TV deal: "It reduces the stress on universities to provide resources. I'm thrilled that the increased revenue comes at such a demanding time. ... This announcement has saved sports -- student-athlete opportunities -- that would have been cut."

CU is back in the black.

No sense in risking any future financial bleeding by adding baseball or women's lacrosse or softball until the football and basketball programs are completely healthy, thriving ready to help the athletic department expand.

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