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Colorado, Utah prepare for Pac-12 football

There are myriad ways the Pac-12's expansion to take in Colorado and Utah have impacted the schools — and the conference.

By Bud Withers

Seattle Times staff reporter



In Boulder, where Playboy Magazine recently named the University of Colorado its top party school in the nation, some people are studying.

Inside the CU football offices, they're spending a few months eyeballing video of every other school in the new Pac-12 Conference, compiling a dossier on their 2011 opponents.

First-year coach Jon Embree has assigned each assistant two Pac-12 teams to scout, as if they're playing this week, just one of the ways the expanded conference has already affected newbies Colorado and Utah.

In his Salt Lake City office, Utah coach Kyle Whittingham recognizes the upgrade in competition from the Mountain West, but he also knows the benefits.

"We had several players in this last recruiting class that we'd not been able to get had we not gone to the Pac-12," he said.

There are myriad ways the expansion to take in Colorado and Utah have impacted the schools — and the conference. Even as Whittingham points to the recruiting benefits of being in the league, he says it's changing the way the Utes will go after prospects.

"Our assistant coaches have been great evaluators," he said. "We've made a living finding that diamond in the rough, and that's still going to be a big part in our recruiting.

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"However, we feel (now) we've got to get in on the high-profile guys."

In particular, Utah must feel as though it's won the lottery. Consider that, as the raging expansion brushfire struck 11 months ago, it wasn't even going to be a part of a bigger Pac-10. The league was on the brink of adding six Big 12 schools and becoming a 16-team colossus.

But when that fell through, the Pac-10 instead went to Plan B, and added Utah to pair with Colorado, which the league had designated as the first addition.

Now fast-forward to this week's announcement that the Pac-12 has a TV deal in place that should pay each school an average of nearly \$21 million over 12 years. Published reports put Utah's projected TV income this year in the Mountain West at \$1.2 million.

Whittingham couldn't suppress a wry laugh at the advancement.

"Commissioner (Larry) Scott did a fantastic job hammering this deal out," he said.

As if that's not enough for the Utes, there's this: In 2011, they don't have to play either Oregon or Stanford — two BCS-bowl teams of last season — and in general, the move to the Pac-12 affords Utah a familiar role. If a team that finished No. 2 nationally in 2008 can perceive itself an underdog, that's the Utes.

"For the past several years, we've played with a chip on our shoulder," Whittingham said. "That's served us some motivation. Our players understand we're going to a very good conference. We've got to raise the bar in everything."

In the near-term, the spotlight will be on two people at Utah: Norm Chow, the veteran offensive guru who left Rick Neuheisel's staff at UCLA to install a new attack for Whittingham; and quarterback Jordan Wynn, who missed spring drills recovering from offseason shoulder surgery but is expected to be healthy by fall drills.

The picture is different at Colorado, where Dan Hawkins, once the face of a successful Boise State program, was fired after five seasons and replaced by Embree, who played tight end at CU in the 1980s.

Colorado comes off a 5-7 season, and given that it put three draftees into the NFL last week in the first four rounds — including two cornerbacks, Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown — there's a suspicion the Buffs could struggle, especially on defense.

The new additions figure prominently into the schedules of Washington and Washington State. Utah's first Pac-12 home game is against the Huskies on Oct. 1, and on the same day, Colorado's initial league game in Boulder is against WSU.

Arizona

Arizona has five new starters on the offensive line; only C **Kyle Quinn** has started a game. ... The hope is to redshirt capable QB **Matt Scott** if **Nick Foles** can stay healthy, pointing Scott to being the 2012 starter. ... Both projected OTs are redshirt freshmen. ... SLB **Jake Fischer** tore a knee ligament in the spring game and will be out six to eight months. ... Wildcats must replace drafted DEs **Brooks Reed** and **Rickey Elmore**; **C.J. Parrish** looked good at one end. ... Big back **Greg Nwoko** incurred a knee injury, but 5-foot-9, 187-pound freshman RB **Daniel Jenkins** had a strong spring. ... CB **Trevin Wade**, who had a poor year in 2010, looked better. ... S **Adam Hall** had knee surgery for a torn ACL and will be out at least until October. ... **Robert Golden** is back at safety from cornerback; he's started at both spots. ... WR **Dan Buckner**, a 6-4 transfer from Texas who caught 45 passes in 2009 before an arrest, figures heavily into the offense. ... 'Cats trying to erase the hangover of losing their last five of 2010.

Arizona State

Gave its Hard Hat champions awards to OT **Dan Knapp** and WR **Aaron Pflugrad**, the Pullman High grad. It's for consistent weight-room effort, plus discipline and work ethic. ... New uniforms at ASU, with alternate black threads, and black and copper becoming secondary colors. ... CB **Omar Bolden** tore an ACL on April 2 and might try to make it back at some point this season. ... WR **T.J. Simpson** also is out with a major knee injury, opening the door for JC transfer **George Bell**, who was a disappointment last season. ... Second-team G **Brice Schwab**, who struggled last season but has lost weight to get down to 300 pounds, told The Arizona Republic he's motivated by a collection of disparaging comments from message boards assembled by his mother. ... **Mike Bercovici** of Woodland Hills, Calif., enrolled early, had a good spring and is pushing for the backup QB spot behind **Brock Osweiler**. ... **Steven Threet**, who had the job most of last year, retired because of concussion problems. ... Offensive line, a problem area through much of **Dennis Erickson's** ASU tenure, played well.

California

North Carolinian **Zach Maynard**, a 6-3, 195-pound lefty junior transfer from Buffalo, took a clear lead over **Brock Mansion** and **Allan Bridgford** in the QB competition. A dual threat, he had an 18-15 TD-interception ratio at Buffalo. QB **Beau Sweeney**, grandson of ex-Washington State coach **Jim Sweeney**, was granted his release. ... Cal conducted spring practices off campus at Laney and Contra Costa CC to accommodate changes to Memorial Stadium. Bears open at Candlestick Park against Fresno State, but will play the rest of their home games at AT&T Park. ... **Jim Michalczik**, former WSU lineman who coached previously under **Jeff Tedford** (and was hired briefly at Washington in late 2008), is back on staff as offensive coordinator and line coach. ... Cal tradition of running backs now falls to **Iso Sofele**, but it's uncertain behind him. ... DB **Avery Walls**, a Georgia product, enrolled in January and has people excited. ... NT **Austin Clark**, a Floridian, showed well, as did DL **Trevor Guyton**, a Redmond HS product.

Colorado

First-year coach **Jon Embree** (an alum) installed a pro-style offense and 4-3 defense, departing from 3-3-5 scheme of predecessor **Dan Hawkins**. ... Buffs list 17 starters returning, but have some key NFL draft picks to replace, including a pair of high-profile cornerbacks. ... First Pac-12 game will be in Boulder on Oct. 1 against WSU. ... Buffs became first school in the country to shoot all practice video in HD, due to a long-standing relationship with a Florida digital provider. Embree said a tracking system in the video software showed nine players never logged into their systems last year to study film. ... Playboy named CU the nation's No. 1 party school. ... **Tyler Hansen**, a 6-1, 215-pound senior, had a strong spring and was named starting quarterback. He won the job last August over **Cody Hawkins**, but was lost for the year with a ruptured spleen in an October game. ... OT **Dave Bakhtiari** looks like decent replacement for first-round pick **Nate Solder**. ... Biggest questions entering fall will be on defense. ... Buffs have set a goal of 25,000 season tickets, some 5,400 more than last year.

Oregon

Defense mostly had its way against an offense replacing three of five offensive linemen and two starting wideouts. ... Remarkably, Ducks had only one player (LB **Casey Matthews**, 4th round) drafted by the NFL. ... WR **Josh Huff** missed much of the session with a knee injury. ... LB **Kiko Alonso**, who already had a DUI arrest that caused him to redshirt the 2010 season, pleaded guilty to misdemeanor criminal mischief and trespassing charges after trying to enter a home, apparently mistakenly, under the influence of alcohol. Suspended now, he had had a strong spring and been projected to take over for Matthews. ... Ducks drew a conference-record 43,468 to their spring game. ... TE **Colt Lyerla**, touted state recruit who enrolled in January, caught three passes in spring game. ... Walk-on G **Ramsen Golpashin** seems to have won a starting job. ... The Sporting News ranked Oregon's opening opponent, LSU, No. 1. ... Reserve

QB **Dustin Haines** was charged with resisting arrest at a party. ... Wide-receiver position will need some help with newcomers in the fall. ... Defensive line depth is excellent, and Ducks could assume more of a defensive identity in the fall.

Oregon State

Beavers defense dominated the final scrimmage, with eight sacks and four interceptions. ... CB **Rashaad Reynolds** had a strong spring. ... WR **Obum Gwacham** (6-5) made a statement. ... Backup QB **Cody Vaz** had an excellent spring, getting increased reps as starter **Ryan Katz** didn't take snaps to allow a broken bone in his right (throwing) wrist to heal. ... TB **Terron Ward**, brother of former Oregon DB **T.J. Ward**, figuring in for playing time with **Jacquizz Rodgers** gone. ... Rehabbing WR **James Rodgers** (knee) says he'll be ready by the opener, but TE **Joe Halahuni** has opted for surgery on a damaged shoulder, leaving his status questionable. ... Redshirt freshman TE **Connor Hamlett** of Meadowdale HS had 11 catches in spring game with the top tight ends sitting out. ... Once highly touted OT **Michael Philipp** now is competing for a starting spot. ... Ex-Duck **Dominic Glover** has moved from defensive end to tackle and done well. ... **Greg Newhouse**, linebackers coach and a 14-year veteran of OSU's staff, abruptly left the Beavers shortly before spring drills when OSU coach **Mike Riley** asked him to become quality-control coach as part of a staff reorganization that includes two late hires in March.

Stanford

Had its spring game at Kezar Stadium, with a crowd estimated at 6,800. ... Backup to all-world QB **Andrew Luck** is **Josh Nunes**, with **Brett Nottingham** pushing him. ... In the spring game, with the top offensive line kept intact on one side, Luck completed 16 of 22 and led scoring drives on his only three tries. ... Receiver is a question mark, although converted QB **Darren Daniel** (6-4) adds promise. Cardinal lost key wideouts **Doug Baldwin** and **Ryan Whalen**. ... DTs **Terrence Stephens** and **Henry Anderson** looked promising at a spot that looms as a possible question. ... TB **Tyler Gaffney** has spent the spring as a starting outfielder on the baseball team, hitting .252. ... One-time WSU commit **Geoff Meinken** is a reserve fullback at 6-4, 274. ... **Vic Fangio**, NFL veteran coach who spearheaded Cardinal's defensive rise in 2010, followed **Jim Harbaugh** to San Francisco 49ers, but longtime Washington assistant **Randy Hart** stayed on to coach defensive line under new coach **David Shaw**. ... Cardinal had four players go to NFL draft: DT **Sione Fua** (3rd round), FB **Owen Marecic** (4th), CB **Richard Sherman** (5th, to the Seahawks) and Whalen (6th).

UCLA

After offensive struggles in 2010, **Mike Johnson** arrived as offensive coordinator from the NFL, while **Jim Mastro** came from Nevada as run-game coordinator to refine Bruins' use of the Pistol. ... DB **Tony Dye** had a knee sprain that kept him out somewhat. ... QB **Richard Brehaut** appears to lead **Kevin Prince** and freshman **Brett Hundley**, with the oft-injured Prince sitting out because of knee surgery. But the battle in August will be spirited. ... OT **Jeff Baca** broke his ankle on the second day of drills and might not be back until sometime in September, one of a handful of line injuries that slowed the offense's progress. ... OT **Connor Bradford**, a non-factor so far, showed glimpses of potential. ... DE **Datone Jones** returned from a foot injury that sidelined him in 2010, and development by **Damien Holmes** and **Cassius Marsh** gives the defensive line a solid look. ... After a spotty offense (12 passes deflected) in the spring game, coach **Rick Neuheisel** apologized to the crowd on a microphone, citing four offensive linemen who were out. Neuheisel, 15-22 in his first three years in Westwood, told the fans, "There can only be one first-time Pac-12 champion, and it might as well be the Bruins."

USC

WR **Markeith Ambles** had a generally poor spring. ... QB **Jesse Scroggins**, a redshirt freshman, appears to have the lead for the backup spot behind **Matt Barkley**. ... Barkley had a

mediocre spring, not helped by some key linemen missing. ... C **Khaled Holmes** was sidelined with a neck problem, leaving OT **Matt Kalil** the only established starter. Coach **Lane Kiffin** calls the unit "the No. 1 question, by far." ... Kiffin is talking up LB **Hayes Pullard** and DT **George Uko**, both redshirt freshmen. Uko came out of spring listed as a starter. ... Trojans have quad-No. 1s at tailback — **Curtis McNeal**, **Marc Tyler**, **Dillon Baxter** and **D.J. Morgan**. ... Walk-on **Tony Burnett** won a starting cornerback spot. ... DL **Armond Armstead**, who would be one of the keys of the unit, didn't practice because of an undisclosed medical issue and USC won't be certain of his status until summer. ... Trojans have awarded No. 55 to incoming Kentucky product **Lamar Dawson**, hoping he rises to the level of previous "55" LBs **Junior Seau**, **Willie McGinest** and **Chris Claiborne**. ... Three starting linebackers sat out the spring game. ... Overall, USC figures to need significant help from true freshmen.

Utah

Norm Chow, longtime BYU assistant, has come back to the state after an uneasy tenure at UCLA under Neuheisel. ... QB **Jordan Wynn**, 26 of 36 for 338 yards in a 2009 Poinsettia Bowl win over Cal, sat out the spring after shoulder surgery. His progress in August will be closely watched. ... Defense generally had its way over the 15 drills. ... In the spring game, the Red team beat the White, 7-0, with many starters sitting out — and the losers had to clean the football complex two days later. ... One intriguing running-back candidate is 6-2, 237-pound **Thretton Palamo**, a former U.S. rugby team member who looked good. ... DE **Joe Kruger** emerged. ... Frosh RB **Harvey Langi** enrolled in midwinter but is bidding for playing time. ... **Griff Robles**, a 6-4, 230-pound sophomore, is the No. 3 quarterback, but could eventually be switched to another spot. ... DT **Sealver Siliga** miffed Utah coaches by entering draft early and didn't get taken. ... Inaugural Pac-12 schedule is kind to Utes, omitting both Oregon and Stanford.

Washington

Keith Price is listed as No. 1 at quarterback after a strong spring. Coach **Steve Sarkisian** called Seahawks coach **Pete Carroll**, his former boss at USC, for advice on how to handle announcing the leader. ... RB **Chris Polk** has lost about 10 pounds and looks quicker. ... TEs **Austin Seferian-Jenkins** and **Michael Hartvigson** looked good and figure prominently in the offense. ... OL **Senio Kelemete** was out with plantar fasciitis most of the spring. ... Offensive line has to replace a combined 91 starts in **Greg Christine**, **Cody Habben** and **Ryan Tolar**. ... S **Justin Glenn** is bidding for more time after suffering broken leg in 2009 Notre Dame game. ... DE **Josh Shirley** emerged, looks promising as a pass rusher, and line mates generally played well. ... WR **Kevin Smith** made a strong bid for playing time in the fall. ... **Garret Gilliland** made a push at weakside linebacker after switching from the middle. ... UW opens Sept. 3 with defending FCS champ Eastern Washington.

Washington State

CB **Aire Justin** was ruled ineligible for 2011 for violating the NCAA's banned-substance policy, ending his career. ... **John Fullington**, promising offensive lineman, moved from his 2010 right tackle position to left guard, essentially switching positions with **Wade Jacobson**. ... Backup quarterback is currently **Marshall Lobbestael**, with freshman **Connor Halliday** No. 3 and **David Gilbertson**, walk-on son of ex-Washington coach **Keith Gilbertson**, fourth. ... TE **Skylar Stormo** moved to defensive end, where he is a backup. ... At defensive tackle, **Anthony Laurenzi** had a strong spring and redshirt freshman **Toni Pole** is listed No. 1 after a late-spring knee-injury scare was judged only a strain. ... JC transfer **Ian Knight** stepped into a starting defensive-end spot opposite **Travis Long**. ... LB **Alex Hoffman-Ellis** performed well, but athletic **C.J. Mizell**'s in-and-out practices dropped him to No. 2 behind **Mike Ledgerwood**. ... WR-KR **Blair Bomber** suffered a knee injury that will sideline him this season.

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Monday, May 9, 2011

Spring wrap: Colorado

By Ted Miller
ESPN.com

COLORADO

2010 Overall record: 5-7

2010 conference record: 2-6 (Big 12)

Returning starters

Offense: 8, Defense: 5, punter/kicker: punter

Top returners

RB [Rodney Stewart](#), WR [Paul Richardson](#), QB [Tyler Hansen](#), OG Ryan Miller, LB Jon Major, DE Josh Hartigan

Key losses:

OT Nate Solder, CB Jimmy Smith, CB Jalil Brown, LB Michael Sipili

2011 Schedule

Sept. 4 at Hawaii
Sept. 10 California
Sept. 17 Colorado State
Sept. 24 at Ohio State
Oct. 1 Washington State
Oct. 8 at Stanford
Oct. 15 at Washington
Oct. 22 Oregon
Oct. 29 at Arizona State
Nov. 5 USC
Nov. 12 Arizona
Nov. 19 at UCLA
Nov. 26 at Utah

2010 statistical leaders (*returning starter)

Rushing: Stewart* (1,318)

Passing: [Cody Hawkins](#) (1,547)

Receiving: Scotty McKnight (621)

Tackles: Sipili (94)

Sacks: Josh Hartigan (7)

Interceptions: Brown (3)

Spring answers



1. Hello, my name is: The first priority since only one coach was retained from the previous staff was the get to know one another -- coaches and players. For the players, they needed to know that a new sheriff was in town, and coach Jon Embree made sure they knew things were different with a physically taxing spring session. Further, coaches had to find their own rhythm working together. And, obviously, new schemes had to be adapted: a pro-style offense and 4-3 base defense.

2. Hansen without Hawkins: After sharing the starting job with former coach Dan Hawkins' son Cody the previous three seasons, Hansen is a man-alone at quarterback. That might help, and the results in scrimmages suggested so. In one, he completed 18 of 19 passes for 246 yards and 3 touchdowns (a 255.6 rating), and his totals for all three scrimmages were 39-of-53 (73.6%), 531 yards/5 touchdowns/zero interceptions (188.9 rating). He also showed he's learning to get rid of the ball as he wasn't sacked in the three scrimmages.

3. Fronting the seven: Heading into spring, the defensive front seven was a question, even with a lot of guys back. It still is, but a number of players stepped up, most notably linebacker Doug Rippy and defensive tackle Conrad Obi. Both are upperclassmen who seemed energized by a coaching change. The 310-pound Obi, in particular, was a revelation. After playing just 100 snaps the previous three seasons, he dominated three scrimmages, piling up 20 tackles, six coming for a loss -- four were for no-gain, by the way -- with two sacks and a forced fumble. Oh, and outside linebacker Jon Major came back strong from a knee injury.

Fall questions

1. Hey, buddy, can you spare a corner? Smith and Brown are off to the NFL, and their replacements didn't reveal themselves this spring. In fact, the results in general in the secondary were a bit worrisome, and incoming players may be needed to help.

2. Operation install: Much of spring was dedicated to figuring out what sort of talent was on-hand, so the offensive scheme wasn't fully implemented. That's going to be a chief task during fall camp.

3. Just for kicks? Embree was outspoken about how unhappy he was with the special teams play he saw on film in 2010, and he looked exasperated more than a few times this spring. The Buffaloes specialists are going to be young and were markedly inconsistent this spring. Sophomore punter Zach Grossnickle averaged just 39.5 yards per punt in 2010, while sophomore Justin Caster was No. 1 at kicker after spring practices.
