

## Colorado-Nebraska series coming to a close

**While schools working to set up non-conference matchup in future, Friday's game last between teams for foreseeable future**

**By Neill Woelk** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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When Bill McCartney arrived on the Colorado campus in the summer of 1982, he immediately declared Nebraska as the program on which the Buffs would set their sights.

The resulting laughter could be heard throughout Boulder and across the Big Eight.

The simple thought of the Buffs declaring anyone their "rival" at that time was worthy of a chuckle. The Buffs had just endured three straight losing seasons under Chuck Fairbanks, and the prospects for immediate improvement under McCartney were not good.

As for making the Huskers the target -- that was a full-blown belly-laugh. Colorado hadn't beaten Nebraska since 1967, and the Buffs had won just one of their last 20 meetings with NU.

Besides, it wasn't as if the Huskers needed a rival. The true Big Eight rivalry of the time was already very clearly established: Nebraska vs. Oklahoma. Those two programs were the dominant forces in the conference, and had been involved in some historic meetings, including the 1971 game (won by Nebraska, 35-31) that was deemed by many as one of the greatest college football games ever played.

That 1971 season also produced one of the highlights in CU history. Nebraska finished ranked No. 1 in the nation that season, Oklahoma ended up at No. 2 and Colorado came in at No. 3.

But while NU and OU continued their dominance through the 1970s, Colorado slipped and became an after-thought, as neither Bill Mallory nor Fairbanks proved able to return the Buffs to respectability. Enter McCartney.

"I knew that Nebraska was the standard by which we wanted to be measured," McCartney said in a recent interview. "They were the type of program we wanted to be. When I arrived in Boulder, we had to make that the red-letter date."

### Early years

The two programs first played in 1898, but did not meet between 1907 and 1948, when Colorado joined the Big Seven. From that year on, the two teams met every season -- and Colorado actually held the upper hand in the early years. From 1950 through 1961, Colorado recorded an 8-3-1 record against the Huskers.

But the arrival of Bob Devaney in 1962 changed everything at Nebraska, and the Huskers' program soon became the envy of Colorado fans, winning five in a row against the Buffs.

In 1967, Eddie Crowder's team took a 21-16 win in Lincoln, and Buff faithful were hopeful that the tide was ready to turn.

But despite some close calls in the ensuing years, Crowder never beat the Huskers again, and Mallory and Fairbanks were winless against the Corn.

Crowder, who remained as athletic director after stepping down as football coach in 1973, even went as far as to attempt to hire away Nebraska's coach. Tom Osborne, who replaced Devaney in 1973, interviewed for the CU job when Crowder fired Mallory after the 1978 season.

But Osborne stayed in Lincoln, Crowder hired Fairbanks -- and the annual beatings continued.

Some were particularly painful. In 1981, the Huskers ran roughshod over the Buffs, 59-0 in Lincoln. Two years later, on

McCartney's first visit to Nebraska, the Buffs trailed 14-12 at the half -- only to see NU slap 48 points on the Buffs in the third quarter en route to a 69-19 win.

That was enough to make CU fans openly question McCartney's vow to pull even with Nebraska.

"We never wavered," McCartney said. "We knew that if we wanted to reach the pinnacle, we had to set our sights that high. If Colorado was going to reach the top, we had to aim for the best."

Although the Huskers won again in 1984 and '85, the gap had begun to close. When NU had to work for a 17-7 win in Lincoln in 1985, CU fans began to believe there was hope.

### **Drought ends**

That belief was rewarded in 1986, when the Buffs ended a 19-game losing streak to Nebraska with a 20-10 win in Boulder.

"We weren't there yet, but the ice had been broken," McCartney said. "We were gathering talent and knew we could get to the point that we were at their level. We were putting ourselves on the map."

The Buffs very nearly won again in 1988, losing a 7-0 heartbreaker in Nebraska.

But one year later, Colorado sent a signal that the tide had truly turned by taking a 27-21 win in Boulder. Colorado entered the game ranked No. 2 in the nation; the Huskers were No. 3.

"I think that's when people believed that we had caught up to them," said former Buff Alfred Williams. "We kept getting closer and closer, but when we beat Oklahoma and Nebraska in back-to-back weeks that year, nobody doubted us anymore."

Nobody outside of Nebraska, anyway. Husker fans still counted Oklahoma as their No. 1 rival, refusing to acknowledge Colorado as a real threat to NU's status. Even though legendary OU coach Barry Switzer had stepped down in 1988, the Nebraska-Oklahoma game was still seen as the marquee Big Eight matchup by many -- including everyone in the state of Nebraska.

But the Buffs finally got the Huskers' full attention in 1990. Colorado scored 27 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to take a 27-12 win, giving Colorado its first win in Lincoln since 1967 and knocking the No. 3 Huskers from the ranks of the unbeaten in the process.

"The program was mushrooming," McCartney said. "It was growing. Once we had those two years back to back, we knew we were going to be competitive."

Colorado went on to win the 1990 national championship, although it was a "split" title. The Associated Press voted CU as the national champs, but the UPI coaches' poll put Georgia Tech at the top.

The deciding vote? NU's Osborne, who weeks earlier had urged Big Eight coaches to stick together when voting in the poll, dropped Colorado from No. 1 on his final ballot.

CU then finished one point behind Georgia Tech in the UPI poll.

Still, the final AP poll gave McCartney something Osborne didn't have -- a national title. Despite his years of success at NU, Osborne had yet to reach the very top.

The fact that McCartney got there first made Osborne sit up and take notice. While he didn't vote CU No. 1 on his final ballot, the Buffs were No. 1 on his list of teams to beat. He instructed his coaching staff to change their recruiting tactics and begin to follow Colorado's lead by making speed more of an emphasis -- and taking a chance in the "character" department.

Osborne never lost to the Buffs again. Colorado managed a tie in 1991, but the Huskers dominated the last three McCartney-Osborne matchups, including the 1994 showdown in Lincoln that pitted the nation's No. 2 (Colorado) and No. 3 (Nebraska) teams.

That '94 squad was almost certainly McCartney's best team in terms of talent. Eighteen of CU's starters that year heard their names called on future NFL Draft days, including 10 seniors.

"My last year, we had the most parts, the most pieces to the puzzle," McCartney said. "It was our most complete team. But we did not play well at Nebraska."

The Big Red domination continued. McCartney retired following the 1994 season, and his successor, Rick Neuheisel, went 0-4 against the Huskers.

Osborne, meanwhile, retired following the 1997 season after collecting his third national title in a four-year span.

### **Big 12 era**

When the Big 12 began play in 1996, it meant the end of the annual Nebraska-Oklahoma game, as the two schools were in different divisions. The rivalry was no more.

That, in turn, elevated the Buffs to the status of Nebraska's No. 1 rival. Some NU fans still refused to acknowledge Colorado in that regard, but the vehemence of their denial only strengthened the argument. With Oklahoma out of the picture, Husker faithful made Colorado the team they loved to hate.

What nobody can argue is that the Big 12 put the Colorado-Nebraska game squarely in the limelight. The annual meeting was moved to the day after Thanksgiving on a permanent basis, giving the game a guaranteed national spotlight every season beginning in 1996.

"With the Big 12 going to the divisions, the natural rivalry of the South was already established with Texas and Texas A&M," CU associate athletic director David Plati said. "The only natural sister rivalry in the North had to be Colorado-Nebraska."

"It wasn't anything new for Nebraska, as they'd been in that slot for years. But Colorado had earned the right to be there based on the previous half-dozen years, and it was a major boost for our program."

Nebraska won the first six Big 12 matchups, but the games were competitive every season. From 1996 through 2000, the largest margin of defeat was five points.

Those games also provided some heartbreak for the Buffs. In 1999, CU missed a field goal at the end of regulation that would have won the game -- and the Huskers won in overtime. A year later, a controversial squib kick after a CU score put the Huskers in position to drive for the game-winning field goal as time ran out.

### **End of Big Red domination**

In 2001, the series dynamic changed more dramatically than in any time in the two programs' history. Chris Brown ran for six touchdowns and Gary Barnett's Buffs destroyed the No. 2 Huskers in Boulder, 62-36, sending shock waves across the college football landscape.

Up to that point, Frank Solich -- a former Osborne assistant -- was seen as the man who would simply continue the Devaney-Osborne tradition. But the Huskers were never the same after that beating, and that loss proved to be the beginning of the end for Solich.

Barnett made it two in a row over the Huskers a year later, collecting a 28-13 win in Lincoln. And, even though Solich would finally halt the skid vs. the Buffs in 2003 with a 31-22 win in Boulder, it wasn't enough to keep his job, as he was fired the following week.

In 2004, Barnett beat Nebraska again, giving him a 3-3 record against the Cornhuskers -- the best percentage by any CU coach in decades.

But in 2005, Bill Callahan's NU team administered a 30-3 beating to the Buffs in Boulder, a pivotal game in a three-game stretch for Barnett that ultimately ended his tenure at Colorado.

Callahan then made it two in a row for the Buffs by thumping Colorado in Dan Hawkins' first year at CU in 2006.

Hawkins, however, returned the favor a year later when the Buffs rallied from a big early deficit to score a 65-51 win in Boulder. That made Hawkins only the second CU coach since 1961 to beat Oklahoma and Nebraska in the same year.

But there was even more historical significance to the 2007 game: It was the third straight contest in Boulder that resulted in one of the participating coaches being fired in the days following.

In 2003, Solich was fired after the CU-NU game in Boulder -- even though his team won.

In 2005, Barnett lasted one more week -- but got the axe after a 70-3 loss to Texas in the Big 12 championship game.

And, in 2007, Callahan was gone after losing to the Buffs.

### **One play that**

### **changed everything**

While the series has been full of great and memorable plays, there might be no more single important play -- for both programs -- than the one that occurred in 2008 in Lincoln.

There was more drama in 2008 when the CU-NU game provided what might have been the single defining play in the Hawkins era in Boulder.

With the Buffs playing for bowl eligibility, Colorado held a 31-30 lead late in the game. Following a sack and an incompletion, the Huskers faced a fourth-and-25 from the CU 40-yard line with just 1:50 left in the game and a CU victory seemed in hand.

But Husker kicker Alex Henery drove a stake through CU's bowl plans by booting the longest field goal in Nebraska history, a 57-yarder that gave Nebraska the lead.

In retrospect, many believe that was the end of the Hawkins era.

Had Colorado won that game, it would have sent the Buffs to a bowl game and perhaps improved their recruiting class.

Instead, CU finished with a 5-7 record, then slipped to 3-9 in 2009. Hawkins was retained for 2010, but the Buffs showed little improvement, and CU fired Hawkins with three games remaining in the season.

### **Last chapter**

The Buffs will head to the Pac-12 next year with a new coach and the hope of a different direction.

Nebraska, meanwhile, can look back at that 2008 victory as a defining moment. The Huskers gained momentum from that win and have never looked back. Bo Pelini has returned NU to the top 25, and the Huskers are poised to be a contender in the Big Ten when they make their move to their new conference next season.

Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn is working with Osborne to continue the series as a non-conference matchup, but no deal is imminent.

So now, the two programs that first met in 1898 will meet for what might be the last time on Friday. A rivalry that has claimed coaches, defined programs and provided fuel for sometimes bitter arguments will come to an end.

One more time in Lincoln, one more time for the Buffs and Huskers.

It will truly be the end of an era.

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colorado

## Cabral instills passion in Buffs

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — If Brian Cabral ever wants to try another profession, the University of Colorado interim coach might consider corporate motivational speaking. Judging by the response of his football team during the past two weeks, it appears Cabral could probably get a group of salesmen on the same page and raring to go in, say, 20 minutes.

Short but raucous meetings conducted by Cabral in the team auditorium prior to games have certainly fired up the Buffaloes, who are 2-for-2 since he took over for fired coach Dan Hawkins.

Colorado (5-6, 2-5 Big 12) must win the regular-season Friday finale at No. 16 Nebraska (9-2, 5-2) to become bowl-eligible, a tall order. But at least CU players will carry some momentum and confidence into Lincoln. That appeared impossible on Nov. 6 after the infamous fourth-quarter meltdown at Kansas left the Buffs spiraling on a five-game losing streak.

Those pregame team meetings, a Colorado

tradition before the Hawkins era, include a drum, various chants and who knows what else.

"Everybody goes to the auditorium and focuses up; it's like an ultimate team-bonding moment," CU junior wide receiver Toney Clemons said Saturday after the 44-36 victory over Kansas State at Folsom Field. "(Before) everybody used to do their own thing to get ready."

Team morale "has been through the roof," junior offensive guard Ryan Miller added. "It's the 'one heartbeat, heart of a warrior.' We've really embraced it."

Cabral's message seems to have touched every segment, every facet of the team.

- Colorado averaged 20.8 points during the five-game losing streak and 39.0 points in two games under Cabral's watch.

- CU quarterbacks averaged 1.4 touchdown passes during the losing streak. Cody Hawkins became the first CU quarterback in history to throw for three TDs in three straight games, the past two under Cabral.

- Junior tailback Rodney Stewart rushed for 102 yards per game during the losing streak but has netted 123 and 195 yards the past two weeks. Stewart now ranks second in the Big 12 and 13th nationally in rushing with 111.82 yards per game.

- CU's defense averaged one sack per game during the losing streak. It recorded eight against Iowa State and dropped KSU

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quarterbacks six times.

- Place-kicker Aric Goodman has made 3-of-4 field goals under Cabral, and on Saturday struggling punter Zach Grossnickle executed perhaps his best boot of the season in the clutch — a 44-yard spiral that backed up the Wildcats on their own 5 with 3:01 remaining.

Miller was asked Saturday why Colorado did not go into the tank after losing its head coach — as a lot of teams, perhaps most, might do.

"We're not like a lot of teams," Miller said. "We're Colorado."

Cabral, no doubt, would applaud.

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college football

## Bufs, Utes are far from immediate Pac-12 rivals

By Natalie Meisler  
*The Denver Post*

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In the Pac-12 Conference's perfectly symmetrical world of historic rivalries, how will the two newcomers adapt when they are separated by the Rocky Mountains?

There are so many pressing details for Colorado and Utah to address in their conference moves that rivalries might fall well down the list. Each has a nonleague in-state rival. And there are more pressing issues in other nonleague scheduling, alumni organization, travel arrangements and getting a new set of scouting reports.

Also, just because the Buffs and Utes have the Pac-12's only skiing rivalry, that doesn't mean it will translate to CU's Folsom Field or to Utah's Rice-Eccles Stadium.

Utah athletic director Chris Hill said last month he hoped to work with CU AD Mike Bohn on promotional initiatives for the schools. Bohn was

unavailable for comment because of CU's coaching search.

There is a good chance Pac-12 rivalries will develop on the field. Utah, for example, didn't have much of a natural rivalry with Texas Christian until their game started determining the Mountain West Conference football champion on an annual basis.

After inventing CU's Nebraska rivalry nearly three decades ago, Bill McCartney hopes CU will immediately target a new conference rival.

Yes, there's some history between UCLA coach Rick Neuheisel and CU, where he coached from 1995-98. But that's history.

Another former CU coach, Gary Barnett, suggested "it might put a little more emphasis on the Colorado State game" for the Buffs.

Having Utah last on CU's schedule could spark something. McCartney said he always wished Nebraska was last on CU's schedule.

"Having a game of that magnitude early doesn't have the same impact," McCartney said. "It doesn't have the leverage of preparing all year for an opponent."

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## Buffs building momentum

*By Brian Howell*  
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BOULDER — It didn't take long on Saturday for the University of Colorado football team to shift its focus.

The Buffaloes defeated Kansas State 44-36 and immediately set their sights on their next opponent.

"It's Big Red week," interim head coach Brian Cabral said. "These guys are getting a little bit of taste of what that is all about, but they are going to hear a lot about what this week and what Nebraska means to this program, what Nebraska means to a lot of dudes that went through this program and battled.

"The very core of this program is centered around Nebraska."

For at least one more week, anyway. On Friday, the Buffaloes (5-6, 2-5 in the Big 12) will visit Nebraska (9-2, 5-2) for the final time as members of the Big 12. Next year, the Buffs will leave for the Pac-12, while Nebraska goes to the Big Ten.

Colorado comes into the game on a roll.

The Buffs were on a five-game losing streak when head coach Dan Hawkins was fired on Nov. 9. They are 2-0 since — and, guard Ryan Miller said, "the team morale has just been through the roof lately."

Morale is so high that the Buffaloes are eager to face the 16th-ranked Cornhuskers.

"We're ready for Nebraska," junior defensive end Josh Hartigan said.

Going to a bowl game — which seemed like such a long shot two weeks ago — is now a real possibility. Beat the Cornhuskers, and the Buffs will become bowl-eligible.

"We've got (a chance)," receiver Toney Clemons said. "We're in a great position and we're happy to be here. It's a tough position, but it's a rival game, and anything happens. That's the reality of it."

Just two weeks ago, the idea of CU going into Nebraska with a chance to go bowling seemed absurd. But the past two weeks have put a different Buffs team on display.

In back-to-back wins, CU has been impressive on offense and good enough on defense.

"I feel like we really just started to hit on all cylinders," senior receiver Scotty McKnight said.

This week will mark the fourth time in the past eight seasons that CU will take a 5-6 record — needing a win to



Colorado's Scotty McKnight, center, scores his second touchdown Saturday at Folsom Field in Boulder against Kansas State defender Stephen Harrison. **Joshua Lawton/Special to the Times-Call**



become bowl-eligible — into the Nebraska game. The Buffs beat the Huskers to earn a bowl trip in 2007, but lost to the Huskers in the 2003 and 2008 finales.

What happens this time is anybody's guess, but the Buffs are just happy to have the opportunity in front of them.

“That bowl game has been a huge goal of mine and I know of a lot of these seniors, so to go in there and to do it and beat Nebraska would be an unbelievable feat for us,” McKnight said. “Despite all the ups and downs of the season, to go out on that note would be something where you could leave a legacy here, and I know that is something that myself, along with a lot of these guys, would like to do.”

Doing it won't be easy. The Buffs have lost 17 straight games when traveling out of state, and Nebraska will be motivated, with a trip to the Big 12 title game on the line.

Yet, after the way they've played in the past weeks, the Buffs say they shouldn't be counted out.

“We're a whole different type of team,” Clemons said. “As a team, we're like one for the first time this whole season. Everybody is just into this season and playing for the seniors. It doesn't come as a shock to me.

“You have to respond to adversity. Coach Hawk was a great guy and he gave us all an opportunity to come in here and play the game we love on the highest level of college. You just come out here and you play for that guy, and that's what it came down to.”

Brian Howell can be reached at [bhowell@times-call.com](mailto:bhowell@times-call.com). Read his Buffs blog at [www.timescall.com/blogs/howell](http://www.timescall.com/blogs/howell).

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## Next up for Nebraska: Colorado

- Story

By CURT McKEEVER / Lincoln Journal Star | Posted: Monday, November 22, 2010 12:14 am

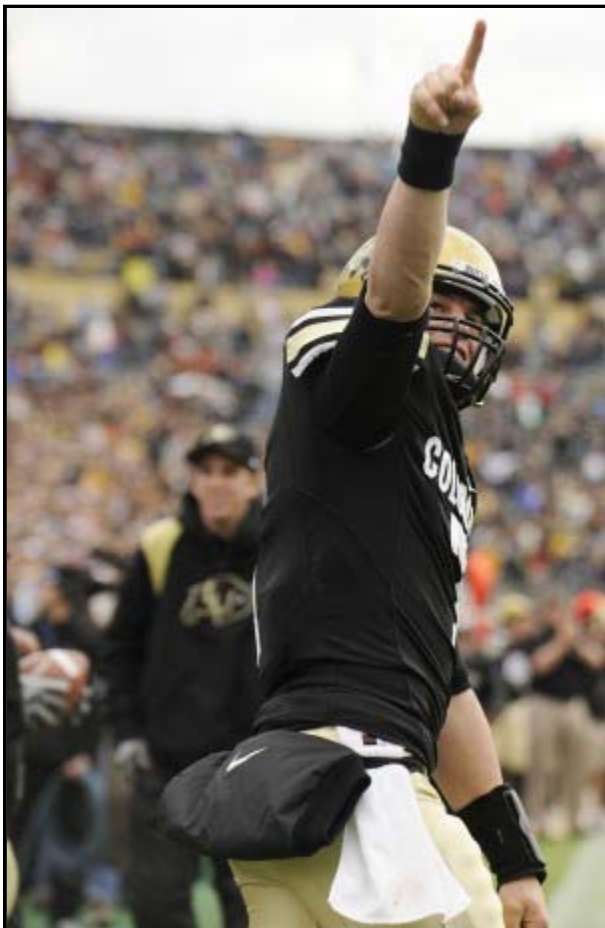
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Colorado's Cody Hawkins points to the crowd after throwing a touchdown pass against Iowa State in a game in Boulder, Colo. on Saturday, Nov. 13, 2010. (MATT McCLAIN / AP Photo)

This ought to be fun.

Since taking over for the fired Dan Hawkins on Nov. 9, Colorado interim head coach Brian Cabral has summoned the Buffaloes from the depths of a 52-45 loss at Kansas (where they gave up 35 straight fourth-quarter points) and gotten them to produce consecutive home wins against Iowa State and Kansas State.

Now, almost unbelievably, the 5-6 Buffaloes would become bowl eligible if they can knock off the 15th-ranked Huskers on Friday in Lincoln.

You'd better believe the long-time CU assistant and former Buff linebacker Cabral will be tugging on his Nebraska rivalry roots with his players.

"They are going to hear a lot about what this week and what Nebraska means to this program — what Nebraska means to a lot of dudes that went through this program and battled," Cabral said. "... The very core of this program is centered around Nebraska. ... This is not just another game."

Colorado made Friday's regular-season finale, the last for both as Big 12 members, more relevant, because not only can it become bowl-eligible, but a win could also knock the Huskers from advancing to play in the league championship.

Saturday, the Buffs got a career-high 195 yards out of junior tailback Rodney Stewart (who also tossed a 23-yard TD pass on his first collegiate attempt) in a 44-36 victory. In the last two games, Stewart has rushed 70 times and now is the No. 2 rusher in the Big 12 at 111.8 yards per game.

Colorado also unveiled a Wild Buff formation Saturday, which helped receiver-turned-tailback Will Jefferson gain 73 yards on five carries.

Senior quarterback Cody Hawkins chipped in 202 passing yards and three TDs. He's now 129 yards from becoming CU's all-time passing yardage leader. Meanwhile, senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight made two more scoring grabs to bring his career total to a school-record 22.

Colorado ranks ninth in the Big 12 in both scoring (24.8 points per game) and scoring defense (29.5).

The Buffs' strength on defense is stopping the run, ranking second at 128.9 yards a contest. Defending the pass has been a season-long issue, though. The Buffs are No. 11 in the league, giving up an average of 270.5 yards.


If Friday's game comes down to a long field-goal attempt, like it did two years ago when Nebraska's Alex Henery hit a school-record 57-yarder, Colorado also has a thunderfoot in Aric Goodman. He's 9-for-14 this season with a long of ... 57 yards.

For all their liveliness, the Buffs go into Friday's game having lost 16 straight regular-season road games. But since it's "Nebraska Week" again under Cabral, maybe we should forget about that ugly record.

"When Coach Cabral took over, we basically set it down to a three-game season. Right now we're 2-0 in that, and looking forward to this big game against our rival," McKnight said. "We have a tall task, but it's not something that we're not up for."

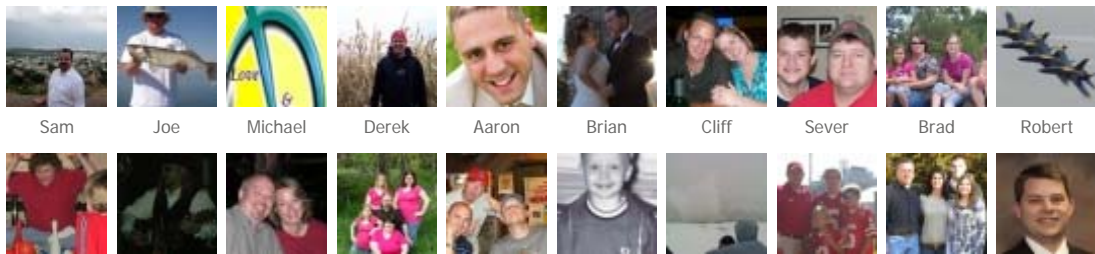
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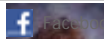

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