

Entire CU Buffs football coaching staff makes rare choice to stay

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

It's difficult to stump Jon Embree when it comes to the history of the Colorado football program, but there are occasions when the second-year head coach discovers a fact of which he was previously unaware.

One of those moments occurred after a recent spring practice when Embree was talking with a reporter and learned that this offseason is only the second since 1989 that the program has returned its entire coaching staff from the previous season.

"Wow," Embree said.

He followed up that moment of realization with one in which he acknowledged that he had to fight off NFL franchises to keep three of his assistant coaches in Boulder this year.

Embree refused to identify which three coaches were being pursued and which teams wanted their services. He's just happy to have his full staff back for a second year.

"That's important because the terminology is the same with the coach," Embree said. "They know it and the players kind of understand what a coach means when he says something. They understand when a coach has a certain demeanor what it's about and what it means.

"It just helps this program as we continue to try to have success. There is a comfort level with the players and trust between them and their coaches. You don't always have to keep rebuilding it. It's huge. Hopefully we can have the same streak next year."

Keeping assistants football coaches at CU for more than a few years has been a challenge in the modern era of the game because state laws limit the number of multi-year contracts each school can have to six.

Most of those contracts are generally reserved for presidents, chancellors, athletic directors and head coaches, leaving assistants to work on an at-will basis.

CU changed its approach when it hired Embree negotiating a lower salary for the head coach in order to offer better initial salaries to his assistants. The school also set aside one of its multi-year contracts for offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy.

Last year CU paid Embree's assistant coaches approximately \$850,000 more than it had paid Dan Hawkins' assistant coaches in 2010.

Embree said higher salaries and multi-year contracts are a big advantage to those programs that can offer them to the best assistants and recruiters.

Embree said he knew when he hired his coaching staff that it would be tough to keep the group together for long.

Embree might finally be using the right formula by hiring coaches with ties to the program and the area.

Three of his assistants are former CU players, three more have deep roots in the area and one other had coached the Buffs in the past and was eager to return for a second stint.

But making history next year by keeping them all together for a third consecutive year might be a bit of a stretch.

CU should be in a better position to compete for assistants financially with Pac-12 Conference television revenue beginning to roll in then, but the price tag for quality assistants continues to rise.

Consider that the University of Washington will pay more than \$1 million in each of the next three seasons just for its offensive and defensive coordinators.

Defensive coordinator Justin Wilcox will reportedly earn \$750,000 and offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau, an assistant in Boulder for five seasons under Dan Hawkins, will make \$350,000.

"I know Mike (Bohn) and Phil (DiStefano) and president (Bruce) Benson are committed to athletics," Embree said. "They don't go to the Pac-12 just to be in the Pac-12. They want to win and obviously with the success that Tad (Boyle) had winning the Pac-12 championship like that, they saw the excitement that it created among our alumni and not just our fan base here but out there in Los Angeles and the California area.

"That will translate to money for the university through donations. I think they truly understand athletics and want it to be successful and understand what is necessary to do it."

Notable

The Buffs return to the practice fields for the final week of spring ball today. The spring game is Saturday at 5 p.m., at Folsom Field with an alumni flag football game beforehand at 3:30 p.m. Both games are open to the public.