

CU Buffs' Jon Embree confident despite bleak predictions

Pac-12 media day on tap for Colorado football coach, quarterback Tyler Hansen

By **Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. -- Coach Jon Embree arrived here Monday afternoon for Pac-12 Conference football media day with a decidedly laid back Southern California aura about him.

Blue jeans, flip-flops, yellow polo shirt, sunglasses, cell phone.

Cool but focused. Confident even though most people don't think he should be.

In some ways the first-year Colorado football coach already has his game face on with the season still six weeks away. He has his game plan for the season opener finished, aside from a few tweaks. In other moments, he is just your Average Joe, a down-to-earth guy from Denver always true to his school and his roots, hoping some breaks go his way.

While strolling through Los Angeles International Airport with his wife on Monday afternoon, he chatted with a reporter about his personal life, football and the questions he expects to be posed to him by media members over the next two days as the Pac-12 conducts its bi-coastal media blitz.

"I know I'm going to get asked about 50 times about being picked last and whether Colorado can compete," he said with a grin but a hint of annoyance.

Senior quarterback Tyler Hansen will join Embree and the coaches and players from 11 other schools this morning at Fox Studios for what is essentially the first official event for the expanded league in the 2011-12 year.

A poll of media members who cover the conference will be released and if it's anything like preseason magazines and Internet sites, it will likely have the Buffs bringing up the rear of the South Division.

After taking only one day off all summer, Embree is ready to get the show on the road.

Since being hired to replace Dan Hawkins in December, Embree's life has been a whirlwind of recruiting, raising money, developing a play book, getting to know his players, establishing expectations of them and enforcing them. And so much more.

The start of fall practices is just 10 days away and Embree has a team he has made over in a short time with 23 new scholarship players and 10 more invited walk-ons expected to join the roster. Nearly 20 players who were on the roster last year and had eligibility remaining either left on their own or were not invited back.

He lived in the Omni Interlocken Hotel in Broomfield for six months before recently moving into an apartment with his wife and daughter, who moved from Washington D.C., to Boulder at the end of the school year. The family is hoping to move into a home it is having built at some point in October.

The program Embree now leads is definitely in a building mode, too. But Embree is cautiously optimistic that if the team can avoid key injuries and develop some confidence, it could surprise. He's not predicting a run at a national title, but he believes his players will be competitive.

"What I want to see out of our team is to do something on the road and be very competitive at home and put ourselves in position where we can do something," he said during one offseason interview. "This program has to learn how to compete and how to win on the road. There are things we have to do before we can even start talking about winning championships. How quickly those things happen will determine when we start having the opportunity to play for championships."

Embree said one of the key elements of successful CU teams of the past had disappeared when he returned to Boulder to take over as architect of the rebuilding project he now oversees. He said the best CU teams always were a family and he hopes to bring that atmosphere back to the Dal Ward Center.

Embree said the team he inherited late last year had factions of players that didn't talk to each other. He said there were times in the early weeks of his tenure when he would walk into the locker room and few players would be there.

Embree said a different atmosphere began taking hold during the spring and he expects it to grow throughout the weeks and months to come.

"This program is unique in that a lot of kids are out of state," Embree said. "I think that's great in a sense of there is a common bond by them. There is nowhere for them to go. So they have to be with each other.

"My son is at UCLA where everyone is from in-state. So every bye weekend and any time they get a free minute, all the kids go home. So they don't spend a lot of time with each other like they do in this program. When you do that and they start leaning on each other and they get that trust factor and that respect factor for your teammates, then I think that allows you to do some things and attain some things that otherwise you wouldn't have based off your talent. Colorado has never had the most talented players. We've had some very talented players at positions, but when you go all the way across the board in the history of this program, it has never been a great deal of individual talent. Colorado has had great teams though."

Notable

CU announced Monday center Alex Kelley will delay his enrollment until January after suffering a broken ankle playing football on the beach in June. ... Senior defensive linemen Tony Poremba and David Goldberg and sophomore longsnapper Ryan Iverson have been awarded scholarships.

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Pac-12 officials introduce rule changes

Pac-12 aiming to improve officiating

By **Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. -- The Pac-12 Conference hired 18 new officials from the Big 12, Western Athletic and Mountain West Conferences during the offseason along with two supervisors with NFL experience in an effort to transform itself into the premier officiating conference in the nation this fall.

In its recent past as the Pac-10 Conference, the league has experienced some major blunders on game days that made it a punch line around the country.

Former NFL official Mike Pereira served as the architect of the makeover and will remain with the conference as a consultant through March. He added veteran NFL referee Tony Corrente as supervisor of football officiating this spring and both men met with reporters Monday evening at Fox Studios to discuss rules changes in college football this fall and demonstrate the replay system that will be used in each Pac-12 stadium this year.

"The emphasis is on training and evaluating, but evaluating for the right reasons," Pereira said.

The most prominent rule change likely to be noticed by fans this fall is one that deals with players celebrating scoring plays and taunting opponents and when they cross the line from one to the other.

When a player dives into the end zone at the end of a long run or completes some other act to draw attention to himself or taunt an opponent in the act of scoring, officials can take the points off the board this year.

In the past, officials could flag such acts as unsportsmanlike conduct, but the touchdown would stand. Now it is a spot foul at the point where it occurred, meaning if a player dives into the end zone from the 3-yard line, the touchdown is nullified and the penalty is enforced from there.

"You probably won't see many of these any longer because coaches are going to drum into the heads of their players how severe the penalty is," Corrente said, noting he comes from "the No Fun League."

"It's a very severe penalty and I think for all intents and purposes, it's an excellent decision by the NCAA."

That change dominated discussion as reporters noted that such calls could dramatically affect a game and rankings and even the BCS standings if they are botched.

Corrente noted that officials have been instructed to "allow for brief spontaneous emotional reactions." He said they are instructed to penalize players who have prolonged or choreographed celebrations or those who taunt opponents.

Corrente said the other major rules changes that will be obvious to fans are a 10-second runoff at the end of each half when a team commits a penalty inside the final minute. A team can avoid the runoff if they have a timeout remaining.

This season players also will be flagged for blocking below the waste outside the tackle box with certain exceptions based on where the player performing the block initially lined up. This change likely will be the most difficult and frustrating for fans to understand initially because it varies depending on schemes and alignments.

The intent of the rule is to prevent injuries to players who were fair game in the past for blockers approaching from behind.

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Aug. 12 -- Practice (9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.); walk-through 5:15 p.m.-6:15 p.m.

Aug. 13 -- Scrimmage Noon-3 p.m.

Aug. 14 -- Academic meetings, no practice

Aug. 15 -- Practice (8:30 a.m.-11 a.m.); walk-through 4:45 p.m.-5:45 p.m.

Aug. 16 -- Two-a-days 8:30 a.m.-11 a.m.; 3:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Aug. 17 -- Practice (8:30 a.m.-11 a.m.); walk-through 5:15 p.m.-6:15 p.m.

Aug. 18 -- Practice (9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.); walk-through 5:45 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

Aug. 19 -- Scrimmage Noon-3 p.m.

Aug. 20 -- Meetings; no practice

Aug. 21 -- Team day off

Aug. 22 -- First day of classes begin; normal fall practice schedule begins 4 p.m.-6 p.m. Practices are closed.

Sept. 1 -- Team departs for season opener at Hawaii.

Sept. 3 -- CU at Hawaii 8:15 p.m. (MDT) ESPN2

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