

Football change, hoops run keys for Buffs in 2012

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This past year may not have been the most remarkable year in University of Colorado sports history, but it certainly was a memorable year.

From Tad Boyle's basketball team capturing the attention of Buff Nation to Jon Embree's football team breaking the hearts of Buff Nation, this was a year filled with highs and lows for CU.

The football team went through unprecedented struggles, but the men's and women's basketball teams went to the postseason; the ski and cross country teams continued to add to their remarkable traditions; the women's golf team had the best season in school history; and the soccer and volleyball teams made great leaps forward.

With 2012 about to come to a close, here's a look at the top 10 stories in CU athletics during the year:

1. Embree dismissed after miserable season: The 2012 football season started with so much hope. Throughout fall camp, the Buffaloes broke every practice with the chant of "Bowl game!" They finished the season by showing up to the Dal Ward Center to watch head coach Jon Embree say his goodbyes at a news conference to announce his firing.

With the exception of a come-from-behind 35-34 win at Washington State on Sept. 22, the Buffaloes didn't have much to celebrate. CU's 1-11 record was its worst since going 0-4 in 1890 -- the Buffs' inaugural season. The season included surprising losses to Colorado State and Sacramento State -- an average team from the Football Championship Subdivision. Eight times, the Buffs were blown out by at least 25 points.

By season's end, many fans had seen enough and wanted Embree and his 4-21 record gone. Although Embree had been on the job just two years -- and had three years left on his contract -- CU administration made the change, firing Embree on Nov. 25.

2. Boyle's Buffs go

dancing:

In 2011, the CU men's basketball team and coach Tad Boyle felt it deserved a spot in the NCAA Tournament but didn't impress the selection committee enough. In 2012, the Buffs knew the only way to get in was to earn it on the court.

Coming into the Pac-12 Tournament as the No. 6 seed, the Buffs knocked off No. 11 Utah and then upset No. 3 Oregon, No. 2 California and No. 4 Arizona to win the inaugural Pac-12 Tournament title. That gave the Buffs an automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament. Once they got there, Boyle's Buffs defeated UNLV in the first round and hung with Baylor for a while in the second round before seeing the dream season come to a close. CU matched its school record with 24 wins, going 24-12.

The success of that run has spilled over to the 2012-13 season. Through Friday, the Buffs were 9-2 and spent three weeks ranked among the top 25 teams in the country.

3. Buffs welcome a new

coach Mac:

For two weeks, athletic director Mike Bohn was on the hunt for a new football coach. A few candidates pulled their names from consideration. Then the Buffs opened up the checkbook and offered Cincinnati's Butch Jones a huge deal, but he rejected it.

Finally, the Buffs found their man when, on Dec. 10, San Jose State's Mike MacIntyre accepted the job. MacIntyre resurrected the San Jose State program, turning the Spartans from a 1-12 team in 2010 to a 10-2 team in 2012.

With millions of dollars invested in the football program and lofty plans for future facilities upgrades, Colorado is hoping MacIntyre can work the same magic in Boulder.

4. CU in London:

Two current Colorado athletes -- and three former Buffs -- represented the United States at the Summer Olympics in London.

Current Buffs Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp both competed in the women's 3,000-meter steeplechase. Coburn (the 2011 NCAA champ) was the top American finisher, placing ninth, and set a personal best with her time of 9 minutes, 23.54 seconds in the finals. Kipp (the 2012 NCAA champ) placed 29th -- out of 44 competitors -- in the preliminaries with a time of 9:48.33.

Former Buffs Jenny Barringer Simpson (32nd in the women's 1,500 meters), Kara Grgas-Wheeler Goucher (11th in the women's marathon) and Dathan Ritzenhein (13th in the men's 10,000 meters) also competed in London.

5. Golfers go to nationals:

With the NCAA regionals in their own backyard and fielding the best team in program history, the pressure was on the CU women's golf team during the spring. Thanks to a huge final day, the Buffs came through.

CU finished fourth at the West Regional, held at Colorado National Golf Club in Erie, and qualified for the NCAA Championships for the first time ever. Seniors Emily Talley and Jessica Wallace led the talented squad, which also included Alex Stewart and twins Jennifer and Kristin Coleman. Coach Anne Kelly's squad finished 18th at nationals.

6. CU adds lacrosse:

Early in the year, the athletic department announced it will expand. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, the Buffs will field a women's lacrosse team.

On March 26, Ann Elliott was introduced as CU's first coach. Elliott, 27, won three national titles as a player at Northwestern and then helped the Wildcats win three more titles -- including in 2012 -- as an assistant coach. In November, Elliott signed a class of 19 athletes to compete in the Buffs' first season.

7. Lappe's squad

on upswing:

In her second season as the head coach of the women's basketball team, Linda Lappe got the Buffs to the Women's NIT and produced a solid 21-14 record.

This season has been better, so far. The Buffs enter today with a 10-0 record and the No. 23 ranking in the Associated Press poll. Along the way, the Buffs have knocked off No. 8 Louisville and blown out in-state rivals Denver and Colorado State.

8. Buffs third

on the slopes:

Colorado has always had high expectations with its ski team. The Buffs have won six national titles since 1991, including in 2011, and five second-place trophies. Seeking another national title last season, the Buffs came up just short, finishing in third place.

Individually, the Buffs had one individual national champion, as Adam Zika won the men's giant slalom. Rune Oodegaard (freestyle) also earned first-team All-American status (top 5) for the men's team. For the women's team, Erika Ghent earned first-team All-American status in the slalom and giant slalom.

9. Harriers still among

the elite:

Much like the ski team, the CU cross country team has high expectations year in and year out. The Buffs didn't win a national title in 2012, but did have another successful season.

The men's team won its second straight Pac-12 title and finished third at the NCAA championships. The women's team was fifth at the Pac-12 championships, third in regionals and then placed 24th at nationals with a young squad.

10. Wooten to the Hall:

On Dec. 4, former CU football player John Wooten became the sixth Buffalo to be enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame.

A guard and defensive tackle for the Buffs in the 1950s, Wooten was the second black player in CU history -- arriving just one year after Franke Clarke became the first in 1954. Wooten was an All-American as a senior in 1958. He was also a three-year starter, helping CU to have one of the best rushing attacks in the country during his career.