

Football: Pac-12's Larry Scott encouraged by CU Buffs' plans

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

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STANFORD, Calif. -- Larry Scott isn't waiting for the bandwagon this time.

The Pac-12 commissioner, who watched Colorado's NCAA Tournament run sitting right next to athletic director Mike Bohn at the Pit in Albuquerque, N.M., attended the Buffs' key road game against Stanford on Wednesday night here at Maples Pavilion.

Tad Boyle's program carried the postseason banner for CU's new conference last March with Cal eliminated in a "First Four" game and regular-season champion Washington and Stanford settling for NIT madness.

In addition to CU's projection as one of five or six Pac-12 teams in position for an NCAA Tournament at-large berth this season, Scott is also pleased with Bohn and CU chancellor Phil DiStefano announcing the athletic department's plans for a \$170 million project to upgrade facilities.

"I think it's very important. I commend them for getting the leadership and different stakeholders aligned," Scott said. "It's something I spent a lot of time talking about with Mike and Phil DiStefano when I was out there during the football season. I shared with them, when I was visiting, some of the projects going on throughout the conference, that there was over \$1 billion of infrastructure projects that have recently been completed or ongoing right now."

Before CU breaks ground on any of the proposed projects -- including expansion of the Dal Ward Center, enclosing the north end of Folsom Field, and construction of an indoor football facility -- the athletic department must raise \$50 million in private donations.

Tick, tock.

"I think there's a sense that some of our schools have some catch-up to do," Scott said. "Colorado has obviously had aspirations for some time. It's really encouraging because they've had their financial challenges and the fact that they can see some daylight ... it's another healthy indicator for the conference."

CU's Board of Regents were just as interested in the new master plan for the Coors Events Center -- improvements that are not included in the \$170 million proposal -- which would include expanding the concourse with increased fan amenities and adding more premium seat opportunities.

"It's important for our fans, particularly those that enjoy men's and women's basketball and volleyball, to know that Coors is a part of the package," Bohn said. "Anytime you have momentum, it's a wonderful advantage. And we have some momentum now."

CU men's basketball season ticket sales increased by 69 percent (from 3,900 in 2011-12 to 6,667 this season).

Arizona leads the Pac-12 in home attendance (14,131 average, 14,545 capacity) with CU ranked second (10,367 average, 11,064 capacity).

The popularity of Boyle's Buffs means football is no longer the only revenue sport at CU.

"Last year was the first year in the history of the school that we were profitable in men's basketball," Bohn said. "Obviously we will be again this year. That's really exciting."

The women's basketball program, which is ranked No. 19 nationally, is also second in the conference in attendance behind Stanford.

CU is hosting women's NCAA Tournament first- and second-round games March 23 and 25 with Linda Lappe's Buffs projected to be playing in the bracket at the Coors Events Center.

"Tad and Linda and their student-athletes and our fans are doing a terrific job collectively," Bohn said. "Everyone has their role, everyone understands their role and everyone recognizes their impact on others through their role. It's just really neat seeing it come together."

Other elements of CU's long-range plans for the Coors Events Center include: A new volleyball locker room, relocating visiting team and officials locker rooms to lessen congestion, a new weight room and an additional loading dock.

Before the 2011-12 season, the \$10.8 million 35,000 square foot practice facility was completed at the Coors Events Center. The project was funded by private donations.

No tuition, student fees or state funding will be used for the "transformational" upgrades Bohn and DiStefano envision. The projects will be paid for entirely through private fundraising and money the athletic department earns through television contracts and future revenue from the Pac-12 Network.

"The critical piece of the presentation (to the Board of Regents) was a total package of facilities for sustained excellence for the entire athletic department," Bohn said.

Scott said about 80 percent of the tickets for the semifinals and finals at the Pac-12 Tournament next month in Las Vegas have been sold.

The commissioner awarded Boyle and Buffs the trophy last season after they won four games in four nights and cut down the nets at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

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