

New defensive coordinator has served same role at eight other FBS schools

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There can't be many college football coaches around the nation with a bigger challenge in front of them than the one new Colorado defensive coordinator Kent Baer is staring at as he prepares for the start of spring football next week.

The 61-year-old must turn around a defense with a lot of returning players who haven't enjoyed much success. Fortunately, there aren't many coaches around the nation with more experience or who are better equipped to handle the challenge.

Baer has coached in 410 games at the Football Bowl Subdivision level and nine bowl games. He has helped send numerous players to the NFL.

The Buffs have been steamrolled in their first two seasons in the Pac-12 Conference. They finished the 2012 season ranked 120th in the nation in scoring defense, allowing 46 points a game. They were 117th in total defense, 115th in rushing defense and 97th against the pass.

Given those facts, it was at least a small surprise that Baer decided to leave the Bay Area where he has lived for much of the past 18 years to move to Boulder and start another rebuilding project after spending the past three seasons doing the same thing at San Jose State.

Baer said it really wasn't that difficult a decision. He said he has seen Colorado be successful before and sees no reason why the Buffs can't be once again. It's just going to take some work.

"I have a great deal of respect for this place, No. 1," Baer said. "I grew up in northern Utah. My dad's first cousin's wife used to work here in the football office. So I used to hear about Colorado a lot. I know it can be a special place. It's amazing to me how many people I run into who are involved with Colorado football or want to be involved."

Baer said he hadn't even made his first trip to Boulder after being hired when he went on the road to recruit in the San Diego area. A fellow passenger on a plane recognized him and asked him if he was the new defensive coordinator at CU. He said he has had a lot of those moments already and he hasn't even been on the field for a single practice.

That will change next week when the Buffs begin learning new schemes and playbooks in their first practice under the new coaching staff Thursday. Practices will be open to the public and figure to attract sizable crowds with so much interest in the new coaches and a handful of new players.

Baer runs a 4-3 base defense that he describes as being different from what CU had been doing the past two years under former coach Jon Embree and defensive coordinator Greg Brown. But Baer said it won't be a massive change for players.

CU coaches have worked with players in winter conditioning a handful of times and have been able to get an idea of the capabilities of the athletes on the roster. Baer said he has looked at video of last season but like

head coach Mike MacIntyre, he doesn't like forming a lot of opinions about the players he is inheriting based on film. He's eager to size up the Buffs for himself once practices begin.

Baer said he plans to take it slow with the Buffs in the spring. He will start from scratch and teach them to do everything the way he wants it done.

He is happy to be joined in Boulder by defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat, cornerbacks coach Andy LaRussa and safeties coach Charles Clark, all of whom coached alongside him the past two years in San Jose.

"It makes it a lot easier for us," Baer said. "... That is critical because we don't have to sit and go through every little detail in a meeting with another coach that you're trying to teach what you want defensively.

"We're going back and teaching it from Day One as a staff together. You just do. We're going to start teaching it from the ground up with the kids. I'm not going to assume they know it. We're going to teach it and be very detailed and coach the little things that end up being big things all the time."

Baer is a veteran coach who has seen it all serving as a defensive coordinator at eight other FBS schools prior to coming to CU from San Jose State with MacIntyre. Four of those previous stops have been in the Pac-12 when it was the Pac-10. He coached at Cal, Arizona State, Stanford and Washington.

"He's a pretty intense guy," CU cornerback Kenneth Crawley said of Baer. "He's going to be yelling at us a lot. It's all for the better though.

"I believe it's his way of showing he wants so much from us, establishing it early. He expects too much from us already. He's establishing like a care for us."

Baer chuckled when informed some of his new players had described him as being a no-nonsense type. He said there is some truth there but he also wouldn't be surprised if their view of him changes over time.

"I'm a pretty no-nonsense guy when it comes to football and winning, work ethic," Baer said. "But I like kids. I like players. They just don't know me very well yet. You've got to set a standard.

"...I can be tough at times but fair. Firm, tough but fair. Hopefully I'm not a guy that is not fair. But I am also a guy who is demanding at the same time. I love having a great time just like everybody else."

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