

## Colorado Classics: Barry Helton, former CU Buffs All-America punter

By Irv Moss *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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To give everyone proper recognition, Barry Helton needed a third Super Bowl ring.

As it was, he made due with the two he won playing with the San Francisco 49ers, one of the cherished pieces of jewelry coming his way in Super Bowl XXIV when San Francisco crushed the Broncos 55-10 on Jan. 28, 1990, at the Louisiana Superdome.

Helton gave his first Super Bowl ring to his father, Perry Helton, in recognition of his father being his hero. Helton kept the second Super Bowl ring for himself, but his mother, Sharon, deserved co-ownership of the ring given her husband, if not a ring of her own.

"My parents always were supportive of me in anything I wanted to do," Helton said, remembering back to his youth growing up on the family farm outside of the small town of Simla, about 50 miles northeast of Colorado Springs.

At a key juncture in his life, his parents did more than just offer support. They helped him become a punter, and he parlayed his skill to All-American status twice at the University of Colorado, a place on the Big Eight Conference's all-decade team (1980-89) and to NFL championships with the 49ers in the 1988 and 1989 seasons.

But there was a time when he wondered if he had a place on the football field.

As the team's quarterback, Helton guided Simla to eight-man state football championships in three consecutive seasons, 1980-82. It was difficult for players from the eight-man division to gain attention from major colleges, but the staff at Colorado found out about him, and he was offered a scholarship to play for coach Bill McCartney.

But in spring practice of his freshman year, McCartney decided to install the wishbone offense. That change didn't fit Helton's skill set.

"I didn't think I was fast enough to play quarterback in the wishbone," Helton said. "I was used to the passing game, and passing isn't a major part of the wishbone offense."

Helton went home for the summer determined to find a place on CU's team where he could excel.

"I had to figure out a place to play," Helton said. "In all honesty, my mom and my dad helped me the most to try punting. I had done a little punting in high school, but never practiced it."

Helton and his dad went to a one-day punting school at Oklahoma State University and then returned to the farm for advanced punting school.

"We were out in the middle of nowhere on the ranch, and my mom and dad would go out with me every day to practice punting," Helton said. "My mom would throw the ball to me underhand, and my dad would watch my steps and time the hang time. My dad was my eyes, but they both taught me how to punt."

For a long time, Helton wondered how he would have done as a college quarterback if McCartney hadn't changed offenses. He believes he would have been competitive.

But there have been great rewards for his punting. He remembers the 20-10 victory over Nebraska in Boulder in 1986 as a highlight.

"That was the most fun I ever had," Helton said. "I had a better game against Nebraska the year before, but when we won, the score was the most important statistic. We came close to going to the Orange Bowl, but we never could beat Oklahoma."

With the 49ers, Helton was in the midst of a locker room of who's who of pro football. He played quarterback for the scout team and sat in on quarterback meetings with Joe Montana and Steve Young.

Helton played four seasons for the 49ers and finished his football career in 1991 after a season with the Los Angeles Rams.

After football, Helton returned to Colorado Springs, got his dealers' license and entered the car business. He is entering the Colorado Springs Sports Hall of Fame at an induction banquet Oct. 30.

"Athletics sure were good to me," Helton said. "At one point of my life, that period was the high point. But as I've gotten older, I realize that was a small part of my life. I wouldn't trade what I have today."

Even with his Super Bowl rings, Helton doesn't mind being called a small-town guy.

"My values never changed," Helton said. "I learned that right was right and wrong was wrong. There was no gray area. It made things real simple."

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Helton bio

Born: Jan. 2, 1965, in Colorado Springs

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