

CU Buffs working hard to attract additional fundraising numbers

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

— *Editor's note: Second of a three-part series looking at the University of Colorado's athletic department. Today, the fundraising challenges.*

BOULDER — Kurt Gulbrand uses simple math to help solve the University of Colorado's facilities problem. The chief fundraiser for the athletic department said a high-level Buff Club membership costs \$8,000 a year.

"I truly believe that 10 percent of our alumni base can afford a Buff Club membership," he said. "If you graduate with a CU degree, people can afford that. We have 250,000 living alumni. That's 25,000 people. That's (nearly) \$25 million before you shake a stick at anything else."

With Gulbrand's math, CU could get almost halfway to its goal of \$50 million in private fundraising by Dec. 1, the first marker of a \$170 million facilities renovation project to expand Dal Ward Center, build an academic center under the East Stands of Folsom Field and construct a permanent indoor football practice facility.

If only building new facilities were that easy. CU, however, has few of the bells and whistles rival schools do.

"My indoor facility was built in 1937, Balch (Fieldhouse), as a basketball court/indoor track," track and cross country coach Mark Wetmore said. "Imagine if basketball was asked to be competitive still operating out of Balch. It's absurd."

Since 2008, Arizona State, UCLA and Colorado are the only Pac-12 schools not to have made major improvements to their football facilities.

"Get facilities off the table (as an issue)," said Brian Reilly, moderator of Allbuffs.com, and a Colorado alum. "Recruits visit Boise State, and they're better than Colorado. TCU had better facilities even before joining the Big 12. People should go online to Iowa State's athletic website and look at their facilities.

"They blow CU's away."

Getting 10 percent of alums to pony up hasn't been easy. In the fiscal year ending June 30, the school raised \$7.8 million for the athletic department, not including \$3.3 million in pledges. In the past five years, the most the athletic department raised was \$14.2 million in the 2008-09 fiscal year.

According to the consulting firm of Grenzebach Glier and Associates, which spent the past school year helping CU improve its fundraising, Colorado's peer athletic departments in public

schools averaged about \$30 million a year. The fundraising struggles led in part to athletic director Mike Bohn getting fired May 28, the first huge step by university president Bruce Benson to address the problem. Business dynamo Rick George, hired from the Texas Rangers, takes over for Bohn and starts his new job Monday.

Keeping the biggest boosters

Part of CU's fundraising problem lies in its demographics. More than half of its students come from out of state, and a majority settle out of state upon graduation. Gulbrand came to CU in 2011 from the University of Michigan, which has a similar footprint.

The difference is Michigan has more than 500,000 living alumni, and only 8 percent of Colorado alumni give back to their alma mater. Benson wants to double that percentage by 2016, which puts a heavy burden on handshakes at football games and cocktail lounges.

One of George's first tasks is to break bread with George Solich and James Cargill II, two of CU's most generous donors in recent years. Solich was the frontman for CU's recruitment of former Cincinnati football coach Butch Jones last fall. Cargill, meanwhile, is worth an estimated \$1.6 billion. Both shun the public eye, and neither returned calls seeking comment for this story.

Solich wasn't pleased with how Bohn's firing was handled but told The Denver Post at the time he would continue to back CU.

"George is a Buff through and through," Benson said. "George has been a significant donor for the University of Colorado, not just in athletics, but in both business schools. George will be there.

"I haven't talked to Cargill in forever, probably since football season, so I don't know where his head is."

Adding to CU's fundraising hurdles is a local attitude toward athletics that can best be described as Boulderesque. Rated as the "nation's brainiest city" by Portfolio.com and the "best city to raise an outdoor kid" by Backpacker magazine, much of Boulder approaches college athletics with shrugging indifference.

It's hard to devote time to college football on beautiful fall days when some of the world's best hiking is right out your door.

"My sense is that there's a whole ton of people interested in sports teams and a whole ton who aren't," said Paul Repetto, a Colorado booster who has lived in Boulder since 1992. "There's not a lot in the middle."

The campus mirrors the community. Some faculty would like to see Colorado turn into the University of Chicago and have every cent poured into academics. David Clough, CU's faculty representative, said he has no problems finding faculty members who will host recruits on visits. Others take interest in the athletes in their classes. Just don't let athletics get in the way.

"The only thing they don't want is athletics to upset their apple cart," Clough said. "In other words,

what happened during the dark times 10 years ago (during a football recruiting scandal) in a sense messed up the university in many ways by reputation. Maybe it affected adversely the admission of nonresidence students and affected the university economically."

And yet, Colorado still averaged 45,372 fans a game a year ago for a 1-11 team. There is interest. There is passion. George's job is to find a way to tap into it.

More TV money coming soon

Helping CU's bottom line in coming years will be the Pac-12's 12-year, \$3 billion TV contract. Colorado received \$13.7 million in 2012-13, will receive \$16.6 million in 2013-14 and \$19.8 million in 2017-18.

However, much of that money will go to help erase the \$20 million debt CU's athletic department has rung up, largely as a result of penalties for leaving the Big 12 and the cost of joining the Pac-12 in 2011. CU is also on the hook for more than \$9 million in severance payouts to fired coaches and administrators over the past seven years.

The school can't wait around for fat TV payouts, in other words, if it hopes to compete on a level playing field. George needs to convince well-heeled boosters to donate. An increased area of emphasis is the West Coast. CU administrators and coaches have traveled up and down their new conference neighborhood attempting to get alumni on board. Soon, they might have models of planned facilities to show off.

"Those are the kinds of things we're getting very, very close to getting in front of donors; having that one snapshot picture of a vision," said Jim Senter, a CU associate athletic director.

Who knows? Maybe first-year football coach Mike MacIntyre will beat Colorado State in the opener and pull an upset early in the Pac-12 season. Maybe George will wow Solich and Cargill. Maybe a blueprint of a new practice facility will be sent to every prospective recruit.

A new leader is in place.

"This place, like so many places, has a lot of opportunities disguised as challenges," Senter said. "You may say, 'Well, what about this challenge?' And I say it's an unbelievable opportunity. We've just got to find the secret sauce and crack the code."

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— Coming Tuesday: CU looks to dig out from its football abyss.

Bucks for Buffs

A look at Colorado's athletic department fundraising over the past five years (in millions of dollars):

Fiscal year Total

2012-13 \$11.1*

2011-12 \$11.7

2010-11 \$7.6

2009-10 \$7.4

2008-09 \$14.2

*Includes \$3.3 million in pledges

Source: University of Colorado

Pac-12 arms race

A look at major facilities upgrades, and planned upgrades, across the Pacific 12 Conference:

Arizona: Opened a 183,683-square-foot, \$72.3 million football operations center this month, including 7,279-square-foot weight room and open-air suites.

Arizona State: Planning a \$300 million to \$500 million renovation of Sun Devil Stadium; hoping to begin construction in 2015.

California: Last year completed \$321 million renovation of 90-year-old Memorial Stadium and a \$151 million sports performance center, which houses 13 varsity sports.

Colorado: In 2011, built a \$10.8 million, 43,000-square-foot basketball and volleyball practice facility. Will complete new lacrosse field this year. In 2008, refurbished the football team's locker room.

Oregon: Opened a \$68 million, 130,000-square-foot, six-story football operations center this month, complete with two theaters, a 2,285-square-foot players lounge, 25,000-square-foot weight room and 124 climate-controlled lockers (each with an iPod dock).

Oregon State: Last summer installed two FieldTurf practice fields with lights to the Tommy Prothro Football Complex. This spring opened the \$7.5 million Whyte Track and Field Center, which includes a \$5 million endowment to bring back the men's track and field program. Just opened a \$15 million, four-story, 34,500-square-foot basketball practice facility.

Southern California: In 2006, opened the \$147 million Galen Center basketball arena and last summer opened the \$70 million, 110,000-square-foot John McKay Center football complex. Renovation of Heritage Hall will be completed in January.

Stanford: Last major upgrade was in 2006, rebuilding Stanford Stadium for \$90 million. Seating

capacity reduced from 85,500 to 50,000.

UCLA: Completed a \$136 million renovation of Pauley Pavilion last year.

Utah: In July, opened a \$32 million, 120,000-square-foot football operations building adjacent to a 75,000-square-foot indoor practice field. In 2010, built a \$2.6 million track facility and this year built a \$4.3 million, 1,410-seat softball stadium.

Washington: Football team moves into \$250 million renovated Husky Stadium this season, complete with a football operations center behind the west end zone.

Washington State: This year pumped \$80 million into Martin Stadium with new press box, 1,300 club seats, 42 loge boxes and 21 luxury suites. New football complex in west end zone scheduled to be ready for 2014 season.

Source: Pac-12 schools