

New AD feels department needs to 'think big'

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Rick George has spent the past three years in professional baseball. Given that fact, you could say he started his tenure as University of Colorado athletic director Monday by committing an error.

He wore a red tie.

The Buffs don't have Nebraska on the schedule in football for another five years and don't even play in the same conference as the Cornhuskers anymore. Maybe George thought the CU faithful had eased up on the no-red policy around the Dal Ward Center.

Nope.

George said he actually hoped to cross paths with former Buffs' coach Bill McCartney while wearing the red tie Monday. McCartney instituted the no-red policy in the 1980s.

"I love to see his passion," George said.

George's first day on the job was filled with meetings and paperwork and donors to engage. Some of it mundane. Some brought his pulse up a bit. He had managed to stock his bookshelves in his office with a few reminders of his previous stops during a career in sports administration and fundraising.

There is a base on one shelf used in a series between his former employer, the Texas Rangers, and the St. Louis Cardinals earlier this season. It features the phrase "18 to 40" written in black ink on the top. It's a reference to how the Rangers went from \$18 million in corporate sponsorships to \$40 million during his tenure as president of business operations.

That was one of the reasons CU Chancellor Phil DiStefano hired George. He also wanted someone with a sense for making the CU athletic department function more like a business.

Perhaps the red tie was appropriate considering he inherited a department \$20 million in the red.

"We have to function like a business," George said. "We have to get rid of this deficit and start working and functioning like a business. That's how we'll structure ourselves.

"We'll look at how we're currently doing business. Where we can be more efficient with our human and financial resources. We have to start functioning like a business. We have to grow our revenues and watch what we're spending it on. I think the key thing is we've got to know where we're going and have a game plan in place."

George said his first 30 days will be about meeting as many people as possible and listening. He said he should have a good feel for the department and most of its issues in 90 days.

At that point, he hopes to assemble a group of 20-30 people to put together a long-term strategic plan for the department. He said the group will include coaches, student-athletes, staffers, alumni, faculty and donors. He said he hopes to have that strategic plan completed by April 1.

"I really need to understand the environment and the landscape first before I can say, 'OK, here is our starting point, and here is where we need to go,'" George said.

Fundraising is obviously a top priority. While there is no deadline to raise \$50 million of the \$170 million CU plans to spend on athletics facilities improvements. George says he believes he and his team can raise the \$50 million by Dec. 1.

"If you don't have a goal of going to a certain point, then you're just kicking the can down the road and we don't want to kick the can down the road," George said. "We need to start doing these things.

"If we're going to have facilities raised by 2015, we need to have that money by the end of this year, and then some. So we can get started so we can have some things done by the 2015 season."

George said he believes the department has already secured some of the money, but he didn't say how much. What gives him confidence he can raise \$50 million in 31/2 months when the department has never raised even \$15 million in an entire year?

"I think we all share a passion and we need these facilities," he said. "We need the academic facility. We need the indoor facility. We need all these things to be able to compete at the highest level in this conference. What I hear and what I'm told is that is a priority for us. We need to compete at the highest level. So to do that, we need the facilities to do that."

George plans to meet with the entire athletic department staff Tuesday. He said he hasn't reviewed all the plans for facilities upgrades but plans to do that Tuesday as well.

"I know we need to think big and we need to go big," he said. "I think we can do all of the different things. We just need to have a very good game plan. We're working on that now and we need to get after it and go starting talking to people about it."

George started his workday at 7 a.m. He met with basketball coach Tad Boyle before having breakfast at Marie's Café. He met with human resources, went over scheduling with his assistant, and stopped by women's basketball practice to wish coach Linda Lappe and her team good luck on their trip to Italy.

Then it was off to lunch with donors, skipping his usual midday workout and back to the Coors Events Center to meet with Lappe and see the basketball coaches' offices and practice facility.

George also met with his fundraising team and his senior staff in the athletic department before an interview with the Daily Camera and visiting football practice for the second straight day.

George said the fact that the bulk of his senior staff has worked together for much of the past eight years will be a big help to him in making the transition.

"My job is to try to get us all moving in the same direction," he said. "They certainly have the knowledge of where we've been and how we got here. It's my job to work with them and others to chart our future direction."

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