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COMMENTARY

Hitting the coaching jackpot makes right guy worth his coin

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LOS ANGELES — There is a reason why top college football coaches demand top dollars:

They matter.

Forget trying to figure out how to hire a great one, as there seems no reliable formula.

Pete Carroll was an ordinary, out-of-work NFL coach in 2001 when he took the USC job and led the Trojans to consecutive national titles.

Alabama foundered for years until Nick Saban, flailing in the NFL with the Miami Dolphins, arrived in Tuscaloosa.

How do you explain San Diego State?

The place was an avocado pit until unheralded Brady Hoke arrived from Ball State and, inexplicably, turned those losers into winners. Hoke parlayed his success into the head coaching job at Michigan.

Athletic directors have lost their hair trying to bottle the magic potion.

Didn't Rick Neuheisel seem the perfect choice to turn UCLA around? He was a former player, a great recruiter and had previous success at Colorado and Washington. It just didn't work. But Jim Mora just might.

Hiring the right coach can turn half-filled stadiums into sold-out houses.

The wrong hire, conversely, can be disastrous (think John Mackovic at Arizona).

Here are, in my opinion, the best five offseason hires:

1, Mike MacIntyre (Colorado): You can't put into words how great a job MacIntyre did at San Jose State. They were talking about shutting the program down less than a decade ago. MacIntyre got there and pulled a mini miracle. He takes over a Colorado program that is rich in tradition but woefully inept after the tenures of Dan Hawkins and Jon Embree.

If MacIntyre can't make Colorado relevant again, maybe it's time to invest more resources into the ski team.

2, Mark Helfrich (Oregon): No one does seamless transition like the Ducks, who have had three head coaches since the 1970s: Rich Brooks, Mike Bellotti and Chip Kelly. It will be a stunner if Helfrich, promoted from within, doesn't keep Oregon humming.

3, Sonny Dykes (California): Ousted coach Jeff Tedford transformed Cal a decade ago from laughingstock to within yards of No. 1 in the country. Tedford, though, was unable to develop a quarterback after Aaron Rodgers, and his style started to grate on players. Dykes is as laid-back as they come, but his high-octane offense at Louisiana Tech led the nation last year.