

Director of player development spent years as Notre Dame assistant

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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The Colorado basketball program lost four decades of experience when Tom Abatemarco left in June to take an assistant coaching job at Loyola Marymount, but coach Tad Boyle has hired another basketball lifer to fill Abatemarco's shoes.

Sean Kearney and his wife, Kim, are heading west for the first time later this month after years spent on the East Coast and the Midwest, including a big chunk at Notre Dame. Kearney will serve as director of player development in Boyle's program, which is expected to be included on some top-25 ballots to start the 2013-14 season.

"I'm excited about him," Boyle said. "I think he brings a lot to the table and is very well respected in our business, our industry."

Kearney worked as a head coach at Holy Cross for one year but was dismissed when his only team fell short of preseason expectations in 2010. Prior to that he had served for years as an assistant coach to Mike Brey at Notre Dame and Delaware and also worked one season under Rick Pitino when he was coach at Providence in 1987. The Friars advanced all the way to the Final Four that season.

"I'm so excited to get back on a staff with good people and good coaches that I really don't care what my duties or responsibilities are," Kearney said. "If you look at my background, I'm a Division III basketball player, and actually not a very good one. So I've played and coached at almost every level. I'm thrilled to be back on a wonderful staff in a program that continues to be on the upswing. Whatever responsibilities coach wants to give me, I'll be happy to have."

Kearney starts in Boulder on Sept. 1 after being out of the game the past three years, at least when it comes to coaching.

After Holy Cross, Kearney elected to return to South Bend, Ind., where he still owned a home, so his youngest daughter could finish her final two years of high school in an environment she was used to and where she had many friends.

In the past three years, he has served as an analyst for ESPN, Notre Dame radio and has done officiating evaluations for the Big Ten Conference. Kearney has also spent hundreds of hours visiting professional and college teams to study different coaches and their practices methods, including the Milwaukee Bucks, Chicago Bulls, Philadelphia 76ers, Purdue, Michigan State, Butler, Temple, Villanova, St. Joe's, and Notre Dame.

"It's just been going around and watching other coaches and growing my game as a coach and learning from some different guys," Kearney said. "It was a really neat experience for me."

Kearney, 53, grew up in Springfield, Pa., a southwestern suburb of Philadelphia. He played basketball at the University of Scranton.

While Kearney won't have recruiting responsibilities, Boyle believes his contacts could help open doors to recruits in other parts of the country.

Kearney said former Denver Nuggets and Notre Dame standout Bill Hanzlik alerted him to the opportunity in Boulder. He said as he and Boyle began to talk, they realized they had relationships with some of the same people and share similar philosophies when it comes to basketball.

"I'm very impressed with the number of guys they have wearing NBA jerseys right now, too," Kearney said.

Kearney recruited former ThunderRidge High School and Gonzaga star Matt Bouldin when he was an assistant at Notre Dame. While Kearney wasn't able to land Bouldin for the Fighting Irish, he did help recruit to Big East Players of the Year in Luke Harangody and Ben Hansbrough.

"I think I can help these guys," Kearney said. "I have great respect for what they've done, but I think I will be able to help, too."

Kearney replaces Abatemarco, who served as an assistant coach in Boyle's first two seasons in Boulder and was moved to director of player development last season.

Boyle believes associate head coach Jean Prioleau and assistant coach Mike Rohn are ready to be head coaches, which could allow Kearney to step into a coaching role with the program.

"That's why I wanted someone with experience, so if that happens, the transition will be smooth," Boyle said.

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