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Q and A with Colorado athletic director Rick George

By **Paul Klee (/author/paul-klee)** Modified: August 4, 2013 at 5:04 pm • Published: August 3, 2013 | 4:40 pm • 0

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DENVER - Colorado moved the Flatirons - and former athletic director Mike Bohn - to lure Rick George to Boulder.

So who is the new AD at CU?

He's a younger, although a recent knee surgery put him on the DL for now.

He's a Fighting Illini, a former football player at Illinois. He's a Buff, a former recruiting coordinator for Bill McCartney.

George) <http://gazette.com/article/1504355>

He's businessman. The days of everyone in Boulder with an oak desk getting a say? Hopefully, they're over.

"I'm not one that manages," said George, whose contract includes an annual salary of \$700,000. "I try to lead."

Who is Rick George?

Exactly what CU needs, columnist Paul Klee believes.

In a Q&A with The Gazette, George shed some light on his career and what he hopes to accomplish when he officially becomes AD on Aug. 12.

The Gazette: I know you were part of some very good high school teams in Collinsville (Ill.). How was Rick George the basketball player?

Rick George: "Just like I was as a football player and just like I am now. All-out, play hard, never



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stop and trying to win.

"I was the point guard in Virgil Fletcher's last two seasons (at Collinsville). We were 32-0 my junior year. Then I think we think we finished third in the 1977-78 season. I was the point guard on that team (with Vanderbilt coach Kevin) Stallings, Steve Ray (who later played at Tennessee), John Belobraydic (Arizona) and Don Osborne, who just built everyone's house in Collinsville. We had a powerhouse. We were pretty doggone good."

Q: Your career path is unusual - from nonprofit work to the PGA Tour to Major League Baseball to college athletics. What is the common thread there?

A: "I think sport, just like it is with business, is about relationships. It's about how you treat people and having a plan and setting up goals and objectives and achieving those. It's about getting everybody to pull the rope in the same direction. That's been my philosophy from job-to-job. I've had to learn different nuances when you're working with a not-for-profit and how that works. And then going to the Champions Tour and the PGA Tour, it's much different.

"I didn't know anything about the different entities of golf. Then going to Major League Baseball, that's very different. But one thing that doesn't change is how you treat people and your business principles and setting up a strategic vision and having a game plan. In that way, it's very similar."

Q: How much did you work with Tiger Woods on the PGA Tour?

A: "Quite a bit. One of my roles was overseeing player relations. So I worked with the players on a daily basis. When I would go out to a golf tournament, typically I would fly out on a Tuesday morning and spend all day with the players and hearing what their concerns are. Then on Wednesday I would spend the day with the CEOs that were playing in the pro-am. Then on Wednesday night, we would take a group of young players and older players out to dinner, just to hear their perspective on things.

"So I had a lot of interaction with the players, which was good. That's something in Major League Baseball that you miss, because you really don't have any interaction with the players. So I'm actually really excited to get back to CU and start interacting with the student-athletes and can't wait for that. That's where I do a pretty decent job. I dealt with all the players, from Phil and Tiger to Hale Irwin, when I dealt with the senior tour."

Q: Who was your mentor?

A: "I've had a lot of mentors. Coach (Bill) McCartney was a pretty strong mentor when I was at Colorado. The bosses and the people I've worked for kind of shaped me. The commissioner of the PGA Tour, Tim Finchem, kind of shaped me. I learned a lot from Tim. I'm not one that manages. I try to lead."

Q: What did you learn from (McCartney)?

A: "You've got to have the right coaches with the right passion and the right energy. And I think we have that. I like Mike MacIntyre in the short time that I've met him. And I think he's the right guy. Now what we've got to do is support him. It's not going to be easy every week. There may be peaks and valleys as we go forward in the next year or so. But I think, having confidence in Mike, we've got the right guy and the right staff. Let's face it. We've got to have the right student-athletes for that to work. And I have confidence that Mike will have the right student-athletes to accomplish the goals we'll have."

Q: He's not 'your guy' as they say. But what is your impression of the new Coach Mac?

A: "I'm impressed by Mike. We have a lot of mutual friends. I've kept in contact with a lot of people in the college business and the professional football business, and Mike has a great reputation. I think he'll be terrific."

Q: Why do you think it has been so difficult to raise money at CU?

A: "You know, I don't know. It's something I'll have to look at. At the end of the day, I think there's a commonality among potential donors, the donors, the alumni and the staff and me. That's the love for the student-athlete and the love for CU. It's a love for the athletic department. That's the

common denominator that we all have. We have to remember that. The reason we're doing that is the compassion we have for the student-athlete and what they do for the university and what they do for the athletic department.

"When we sit down to identify our goals, those goals are going to be based around the fact that we want to create a whole experience for the student-athletes. We want to graduate our student-athletes. We want to have a successful department that wins championships. And we want to do it in the fabric of the university in a very inclusive group. That's what we're going to do. Once a Buff, always a Buff, and we want people involved and moving in the same direction."

Q: You're a baseball guy right now. CU doesn't have baseball. Would you add a baseball program?

A: "Heck, I don't know. I'd like to certainly look at it at some point and see if there's a fit. I do love baseball. I love all sports. I want all of our teams to be successful. If baseball's something that fits down the road, we'll certainly consider it. But I need to know the landscape better before we start adding things. We need to do what we do now very well before we decide to start to think about addition."

Q: Can CU win a national championship in football?

A: "I do. I wouldn't be there if I didn't believe that. I think all of our sports can win a national championship. That's the mindset we have to embrace. It's going to be hard work and it's going to be (about) having the right student-athletes. Can it be done? Absolutely."

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Klee: Here's the past; Now, Rick George is the answer for CU's future

By Paul Klee (/author/paul-klee) Modified: August 5, 2013 at 9:38 am • Published: August 4, 2013 | 6:45 pm • 1

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(http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://gazette.com/article/1504386)Klee;

DENVER — The year was 1985. A young man on a college football staff, under the title of recruiting coordinator, was hot on the trail of a blue-chip wide receiver from a high school in Oklahoma.

In a lapse of judgment, the recruiter gave the recruit \$100 to pay for a hotel room. That's against NCAA rules, and the football program was placed on probation.

The recruiter's name? Rick George. He's the new athletic director at CU.

And my goodness, did CU ever nail this hire.

I want to get this back story out there. It needs to be out there before some precocious academic in Boulder decides George is too perfect, too powerful, too good at raising money for the CU athletic department that it's time to dig up some dirt.

There's the dirt. Almost three decades ago, George did what young men in their mid-20s do: He messed up. He had a lapse in judgment. He's sorry.

"You can't take shortcuts. It was a mistake I made. It was a dumb mistake. I've learned a lot from it," George told me in a phone conversation. "I think it's helped shape me into who I am. I don't take shortcuts. I work hard.

"Sometimes you slip up, and I did. I made a mistake and I moved on."

You know who didn't move on?



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The shortsighted college administrations who didn't hire George before the Buffaloes got their claws on him. George has tried to get back in college athletics for some time.

"It's where my heart is, working with student-athletes," he said.

George was a finalist for the AD job at Ole Miss; he had preliminary phone conversations with Illinois.

"It wasn't the right time for them; it wasn't the right time for me," George said of his alma mater, Illinois.

There were others, too, none quite as attractive to George as CU, where he served as recruiting coordinator and football operations manager from 1987-91, a rare golden era for Buffs football.

"Coach (Bill) McCartney was a very strong mentor to me," George said.

Hiring George as AD is the best move CU's made since a female buffalo was chosen to play Ralphie.

George, the chief operating officer with Major League Baseball's Texas Rangers, isn't a home-run hire. Hiring George is hitting for the cycle.

"I hope they don't take this the wrong way," Mike White told me over the phone. "But Colorado has no idea how good Rick George is. I'll tell you this: They're going to find out how good he is."

Who's Mike White? He was the dynamic football coach at Illinois who lost his job in part because George paid \$100 for a hotel room for a recruit.

And you won't find a bigger fan of George than White.

The recruit was Hart Lee Dykes, a superstar wide-receiving prospect who not only devastated defenses. He devastated entire programs. His recruitment fired up a bidding war that eventually landed four college programs on NCAA probation.

"Forget Hart Lee Dykes. That's like talking (about) whether Rick missed a tackle in a game 30 years ago. Who gives a damn? Does that really matter if he can run an athletic department?" White said.

"The most important thing is you've got a businessman in there at Colorado who knows the financial side, who knows the role of football. If Colorado wants to compete (in the Pac-12) with Oregon, USC, UCLA, Cal, you need a businessman. It's big business. You know that."

I do.

At long last, the hiring of George, who officially begins as AD on Aug. 12, indicates CU does, too.

His is a unique background for a college AD. Given its difficulty in raising money through the years, CU athletics needed a unique AD.

Successful runs in nonprofit work (as CEO of the Fore!Kids Foundation), golf (as executive vice president of the PGA Tour and president of the Champions Tour) and MLB (with the Rangers), suggest George's business skills are transferrable.

This is like an elite athlete performing at the top of the game - no matter which game it is.

"From sport to sport, one thing that doesn't change is how you treat people and your business principles," George said.

I've found that college administrations often make one of two errors. They either mistake little things for big things, or the higher powers on the academic side get involved with stuff they don't know enough about.

Both have been evident at CU.

CU has been more concerned with having enough vans for the ski team, or players for the women's lacrosse team, than adequately funding a football program that pays for both.

To make the little things work, the big thing must work.

With five teams in the preseason USA Today/Coaches Top 25 poll, the Pac-12 is confirmed as a football behemoth.

CU football, the biggest thing, must start working.

"I think all of our sports can win a national championship," George said. "That's the mindset we have to embrace."

George said he doesn't believe his role in NCAA improprieties almost 30 years ago had a negative influence on his attempts to rejoin college athletics.

"No, I don't think it has impacted my career at all," George said.

I disagree. There were college administrators scared away by something that happened long ago, in the '80s, something that, if he were hired, would only be a one-day story.

This is that day.

And with George in charge, CU's day is coming.

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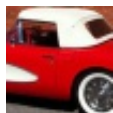
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Final (first) word on Rick George

Published: August 5, 2013, 11:00 am, by Paul Klee

As you might've noticed, **I'm a Rick George fan.** (<http://gazette.com/klee-heres-the-past-now-rick-george-is-the-answer-for-cus-future/article/1504386>)

CU hired a good one.

If George can't fire up the donors around Buffs athletics, nobody can. That's my story and we're sticking to it.

First things first, though: The Buffs must get football rollin'. George told me it could take some time. When the hole is this deep — in terms of Pac-12-level talent and fundraising — one man can't shovel you out.

But George, even though he didn't hire Mike MacIntyre, believes Mac2 is the man. This was a key comment in **our Sunday Q&A with the new AD in Boulder** (<http://gazette.com/q-and-a-with-colorado-athletic-director-rick-george/article/1504355>).

"I've kept in contact with a lot of people in the college business and the professional football business, and Mike has a great reputation," George said. "I think he'll be terrific."

It is always a concern when a guy is not "your guy." Mac2 isn't George's guy. But at least in this case, real recognizes real.

And I believe — for the first time in a while — CU has real leadership in the two most important positions in an athletic department:

The AD's office and the head football coach's office.

-Back from a brief vacation. A great friend is getting married — congrats, Juice! — and with that comes bachelor-party duties.

Big week of Broncos coverage coming up, and The Gazette will be in San Francisco on Thursday for the first preseason game. As usual, check this blog for daily updates from Broncos training camp.

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