

# Mike MacIntyre Brings Hope and a New Commitment to Colorado

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## Mike MacIntyre is the right fit at Colorado.

In the days after Jon Embree was fired as head coach at Colorado last fall, the angry and frustrated former Buffaloes tight end went public with complaints about what he perceived was the school's lack of

commitment to winning.

Embree said that during his brief two-year tenure, he was forced to pay out of his own pocket for some of the travel costs of his assistant coaches to attend a summer camp in California where they could see potential recruits. He said he routinely paid for bottled water in the football offices because the school would supply only a few weeks' worth each month. Embree said there weren't enough chairs in the offensive line meeting room, and he couldn't get more. He brought his own desk from home when CU balked at replacing the one left behind by his predecessor.

Colorado fans reacted with frustration of their own, believing Embree was blaming his inability to win games or field a competitive team on trivial issues. The Buffs went 4–21 in Embree's two seasons, including a 1–11 mark in 2012 — the worst season in the modern history of the program.

Embree probably picked the wrong time to bring those issues to light, but some onlookers completely missed or ignored the underlying message he was trying to convey. Embree's point was that while his bosses talked publicly about wanting a first-class football program, they weren't always acting like it behind the scenes.

Even Embree's former boss acknowledged at the time he fired the coach that the school needed to invest more in football to achieve better results, especially in light of the Buffaloes' move to the Pac-12, which had six teams ranked in the top 25 late last season. Colorado has produced seven consecutive losing seasons and hasn't been to a bowl game since 2007.

"We were exposed in this league," former athletic director Mike Bohn said at the press conference announcing Embree's dismissal. "So did we give Jon a big enough shovel? We tried to provide additional enhancements to that shovel. But is it enough? The answer is no. I think that's the challenge that we have, and I think that's why you hear the chancellor and the president saying that we will continue to try and add to that shovel to help."

The school left no doubt about its commitment to improve its flagship program when it hired Mike MacIntyre away from San Jose State in December. Colorado made MacIntyre the highest-paid coach in its history with a salary of more than \$2 million per year. No previous CU coach had made even \$1.5 million a year. It also nearly doubled the total salary pool for the entire coaching staff by committing \$5 million annually to MacIntyre and his nine assistants.

Colorado also agreed to a clause in MacIntyre's contract requiring the school to complete certain steps toward major facilities upgrades over the next two years. If it fails to meet those deadlines, MacIntyre could leave for another job without having to pay a buyout.

"We're going to give everything we have on the field, and we're going to improve and we're going to keep getting better, but to do what we want to do ... all of this has to start moving forward, and to be frank with you, it has to start moving forward pretty fast," MacIntyre told the Colorado Board of Regents in February.



The school took the first step toward making good on those promised upgrades when it announced details of a plan to spend \$170 million on a permanent indoor practice facility, a new academic center, weight room, coaches offices and closing in the north end of Folsom Field. CU is now in the early stages of raising the money but hasn't committed to a start date.

This is a school playing catch-up in a conference in which its competitors have combined to spend more than a \$1 billion on facilities improvements — most related to football — in the past three years.

“The university is definitely standing behind the athletic department,” says Frances Draper, Colorado’s vice chancellor for strategic relations. “We’ve had our ups and downs, and we really feel like we have them worked through to the point where we have a good system and we’ve brought in a great new coach and we’ve got very strong academic support. So we’ve got all the pieces to build this going forward.”

Dramatically increasing coaching salaries and committing to facilities improvements is no small undertaking at Colorado right now because the athletic department is \$22 million in debt to the school.

Most of that debt — about \$16 million — was caused by the move from the Big 12 to the Pac-12. CU forfeited approximately \$7 million in Big 12 distributions when it left that league two years ago, and it did not receive a full share of Pac-12 revenue during its first year in the conference in 2011. The rest of the debt comes from paying buyouts to three former coaches — Gary Barnett, Dan Hawkins and Embree — in just seven years.

“This was a long-term commitment with long-term rewards that we’re anticipating being a big part of our resurgence,” Bohn says of switching conferences and having to bite the financial bullet to make it happen.

Colorado has a long and proud history on the football field. Only 12 FBS programs have played more seasons than Colorado’s 123. The Buffs are 23rd in the nation in wins and are one of only 25 schools since 1936 to win a national championship and have a Heisman Trophy winner.

It is no wonder Buffs fans are frustrated. They grew accustomed to winning and being a part of the national conversation every week throughout the 1990s and early 2000s before nosediving late in the 2005 season.

Colorado is modeling its plans to rebuild its football program on what it has done in basketball.

CU began investing more heavily in its basketball program with incremental improvements starting six years ago. The biggest piece of that investment was spending more than \$12 million on a practice facility and other additions at the Coors Events Center.

Those additions have been in place for two years, and the basketball program is in the midst of a historic run of success with three consecutive 20-win seasons for the first time in school history and two consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances. Next year’s team could be the best in the modern history



of the program. That success has made coach Tad Boyle the most popular guy in a town and state traditionally dominated by football.

“We made a commitment to the facility. We made a commitment to the young men. We made a commitment to the coach. We made a commitment to our fans, and everyone rallied around that,” Bohn says. “That intensity of interest is a combination of all the key elements that are vital for a team to be productive and be competitive and to represent us at the level we are at. I know that conviction was extremely strong for basketball.

“...As we look around the Pac-12 Conference, everywhere we go, we see the commitment. We see what we are up against. The bar is raised high. It’s higher than it’s ever been. This is a monumental challenge for everyone.”

***Wrote by Kyle Ringo for Athlon Sports. This article appeared in Athlon Sports' 2013 Pac-12 Preview Edition. [Visit our online store](#) to order your copy to get more in-depth analysis on the 2013 Pac-12 season.***

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