

Colorado Buffaloes football worries run deep, but Buffs4Life sees hope

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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Derek West wants to make something perfectly clear. The president of Buffs4Life likes Mike Bohn. The athletic director, fired May 28, helped move Colorado from the unstable, fluid Big 12 to the growing, geographically appealing Pac-12. He hired a promising football coach in Mike MacIntyre.

But West, a Colorado offensive tackle from 1991-94, is deeply concerned about his alma mater at a dangerous crossroads.

"Mike is a great guy," West said. "Just like Jon Embree, you can argue both sides. But at the end of the day, the private donors, the private funding, was starting to significantly decrease and all but stop.

"I'm not talking the top guys. I'm talking about the guys donating \$5,000 a year. You say that's not a very big donor but if you put 100 of those guys together it's a pretty big donor."

West, drafted in the fifth round by the Indianapolis Colts, isn't the only ex-Buffs great who's worried. This is arguably the narrowest precipice the football program has ever negotiated.

It's more precarious than the probation years of 1962-63, the start of three straight 2-8 seasons. It's more than the Chuck Fairbanks error when the Buffaloes lost to Drake at home in back-to-back years.

Colorado is last in the Pac-12 on the football field and off, is heavily in debt, must raise \$50 million as part of a long-overdue \$170 million facilities upgrade and has no athletic director. Every other school in the Pac-12 is completing major facilities projects.

Colorado's is still in the planning stages.

The lone ray of hope for Buffs Nation is MacIntyre, who has wowed alumni, boosters and marginal fans with his down-home Southern hospitality, not to mention raising San Jose State from deeper depths than Colorado is in now.

"I've met with coach MacIntyre on three separate occasions," West said. "I like what I hear. I like what I see. I like the direction. I'm excited about coach MacIntyre and the staff he has in place. He's saying the right things.

"Now, he's trying to make a five-course meal and the pantry's kind of empty. He doesn't quite have the ingredients to make this exquisite dinner."

West has a strong voice, but he says it's not nearly as powerful as people say. Fans and radio talk show hosts claim Buffs4Life hired Embree, a founding member. It's as if they gave Bohn the speech to read at the press conference.

It's dead wrong.

Buffs4Life is a fund-raising organization that helps former Colorado athletes who've fallen on hard times. In their golf tournament two weeks ago, they raised more than \$100,000 for the wife and three kids of Bryan Stoltenberg, West's teammate who died Jan. 4 from injuries suffered in a car accident.

They flew out Chancellor Lee Adams, the disabled son of incarcerated ex-teammate Rae Carruth, to provide funding. They're also helping former basketball player Julie Hoehing, who's fighting cancer, and Marcellous Elder, an ex-teammate who suffered a stroke this past spring.

"I get a little frustrated with some people publicly on radio or in media saying the Buffs4Life had an agenda on who they hire and don't hire," said West, president of Muscle Pharm, a Denver-based nutrition company. "We could give a *rip* who they hire as head coach up there. We're trying to help out former Buffs financially.

"People are clueless as to what we do as an organization. We are not affiliated with the university whatsoever."

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After concussion, former Gopher switches colleges and returns to 'first love'

By DANIEL DULLUM, Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, July 4, 2013 1:00 am

After two seasons of playing big-time football in the Pacific-12 Conference, Kyle Washington decided not only to give up the gridiron, but switch schools and sports as well.

Washington, a 2012 Florence High graduate, was “medically retired” by the University of Colorado football program after suffering a series of concussions in his sophomore year. Despite being medically retired, Washington had the option of continuing his education at Colorado, because his scholarship no longer counted against the total allowed by the NCAA for the Buffaloes football program.

Instead, he wanted to continue with competitive varsity sports, and landed at Lindenwood University-Belleville, where he will play basketball for the Illinois-based NAIA school.

Because he is changing sports as well as moving down from Division I, Washington will have three seasons of basketball eligibility with the Lynx, and a full athletic scholarship.

“I really just wanted to play something,” Washington said. “It’s kind of hard as an athlete to just stop playing completely and just go to school. I chose to go back to my first love, basketball. I was looking at places with my girlfriend, sent out some highlights, and tried to send to all the schools that I could. They were the first people interested, so I committed to them.”

As a senior at Florence High, Washington was the No. 21-ranked basketball player in Arizona and named to the SuperPrep All- Far West team. A two-time all-state performer, Washington averaged 22 points, six rebounds and four assists per game in his senior year.

At Lindenwood-Belleville, Washington, who was primarily a shooting guard for the Gophers, will play point guard.

“I was really a point guard in high school. I just played the two (guard) because they didn’t want me to get double-teamed right when I got the ball. Every time it was late in the game, I was bringing up the ball.

“I’d been playing the point since I got to high school, and in traveling basketball, I always played point guard. That’s my true position.”

LU-Belleville assistant coach Allen Siedle said in a statement that the Lynx program is “very excited” to add Washington to its roster, saying, “Kyle’s an outstanding athlete with a big body for a point guard. He has a strong athletic background and is coming from one of the top college athletic programs in the country. We are looking for him to be a leader on and off the court.”

As Washington tells it, the feeling was mutual.

“They were excited and wanted to do everything so fast,” Washington said. “That kind of intrigued me because after not playing basketball for such a long time, it was exciting to me that someone was able to pull the trigger that quick. It was within a day and they were on it. And coming back to basketball, I would love someone to be excited about me coming back to basketball as well.”

Being a scholarship athlete at Colorado, Washington found that over the last two years, he didn’t have time to play basketball at all, either leisurely or in intramurals.

“The coaches didn’t tell me not to play basketball, it’s just too hard to try that while you’re playing, especially in my freshman year, trying to get my playbook down. You just don’t have the time,” Washington explained. “I don’t think they would have held me back from it, but if you’re making mistakes because of it and it’s a detriment to your play, then yes. I could see that being a problem.”

Playing as a safety and linebacker, Washington earned two varsity letters at Colorado. He played in 15 games during his two-year career, making 27 tackles.

But his sophomore year didn’t end so well. Washington suffered a concussion on kickoff coverage in a loss to Arizona State on Oct. 11 and missed the next four games because of that injury. However, he continued to practice and played in the last two games of the season, though the effects of the concussion still lingered.

“You just want to play,” Washington told Buffzone.com. “You work so hard in the offseason and then you hurt yourself. Those games that you are out, it seems kind of ridiculous. You feel like you’re OK, especially as a football player. That’s what the sport is, so”

During winter workouts, Washington was still experiencing concussion symptoms. He had blurred vision and said he felt like he was going to fall during workouts. He also had trouble sleeping and suffered near continuous headaches.

To compound matters, his mother, Tammy, suffered a heart attack in April and underwent open heart surgery. And a close friend died from a drug overdose. The sum took its toll academically and made Washington seriously consider leaving the Buffaloes football program, which he did before spring practice.

“It’s real hard,” Washington said of walking away from football. “You kind of sit back and wonder who you are. You kind of lose some status, you lose everything that you thought you had, really.”

After seeing a concussion specialist, Washington began to slowly return to normal. The intensity of his concussion symptoms have dissipated, and now feels that he’s ready for his next challenge – picking up a sport at the collegiate level that he shelved for two years.

“I’m right back to where I was. It’s like riding a bicycle. I’ve been playing basketball since I was about

5,” Washington said. “Right now, my game is where it should be. I’m excited to get coached up and get back in the swing of things as far as the competitive aspect, and adjusting to the college officiating.

“My ability is still there.”