

CU GOLF HISTORY & TRADITION

The game of golf migrated to the United States from Europe, and was introduced at the college level around 1850. As the sport became popular, proponents sought out the warmer climates where it could thrive year-round. And as golf popularity grew, it spread to the larger cities where there was a desire for outdoor recreation, but the financial burden of building and maintaining a golf course was rather great.

Several eastern universities were among the earliest institutions to entertain the game of golf as a "club." As this relatively new sport enticed athletes of all ages to allot their recreation time to it, cities began to select acreage specifically as sites for future golf courses. Around this time, the late 1800s, several universities were endowed with funds that permitted their own private courses. Golf fell in line with most other sports at the time, which originated as clubs at American colleges.

In 1901, a group of professors and students formed a club for golf at the University of Colorado, but were without any real local place to play until 1917, when the city of Boulder built a nine-hole course on the north side of town. This course featured "buffalo" grass, sand greens and a "pasture-pool," complete with gophers. College enthusiasts were invited to join the local "divot diggers," and so golf took off in Boulder Valley. Denver already had the Denver Country Club and Cherry Hills, so Boulder was growing up in this area.

Golf was one of the last minor sports to become a varsity program, attaining that status in 1912. CU initiated a golf team that year, and original opponents included Denver University, Colorado College and Greeley State Teachers College

(now Northern Colorado). World War I had delayed many of the college level sport programs, and the program resumed play in 1920 under Joe Mills, who had coached football the previous two seasons.

Golf at CU underwent a reorganization in 1924, with the first varsity match a challenge between two DU football players (who were caddies at Denver C.C.) and two CU football seniors, who kidded their opponents about the "sissy-game." They learned during the summer at a cost of 50 cents per round. Walt Franklin and Burke bought three clubs and six golf balls from a shop on Denver's Larimer Street to play the match, but there is no record of who actually won. But competitive golf had finally arrived on the CU campus.

Prior to World War II, team captains often served as player-coaches. But since 1948, the University of Colorado has had only two coaches, Les Fowler (1948-76) and Mark Simpson (1976-current). Fowler, an accomplished player himself, led CU into the Big Seven Conference in 1948, finishing second in the league meet as a senior player-coach. It marked the beginning of the modern era of Colorado golf.

It took the youthful Fowler just six years to bring the first championship to Boulder. In 1954, Keith Alexander shot a 216 for 54 holes, powering the Buffs to the league title. The following year, Fowler's team did it again, although the Buffs had to share the spotlight as 1955 Big Seven champions with Oklahoma.

When Oklahoma State became the eighth school to enter the conference, a dynasty of unequalled magnitude resulted. The Cowboys have proceeded to win every Big Eight tournament since 1958-with only three exceptions. In 1968 the Bison surprised the Grier Jones-led Okie Staters by shaving 35 strokes off the previous year's winning total to upset the defending



The 1953-54 Big Seven Champion Buffaloes

Front Row: Bob Webb, Keith Alexander, Jim Day, George Hoos;

Back Row: Coach Les Fowler, Dick Mulhauser, Sam Beeler, Bob Diehl, John Kettman.

University of Colorado Golf Coaches

Head Coach	Seasons	Tenure
Joe Mills	2	1920-21
Francis Keck	2	1922-23
Walter Franklin	3	1934-36
Mark Schrieber	1	1940
Leo Stasica	1	1944
Don Bell	1	1947
Les Fowler	29	1948-76
Mark Simpson	29	1977-2005
Brad Neher	1/2	2006 (interim)
Roy Edwards	9	2006-current

(prior to World War II, team captains often served as player-coaches)



Mark Simpson's first Buffalo team (1977)

champs and interrupt the Cowboys' dominant hold. (Missouri won in 1984 and Oklahoma in 1992.)

That 1968 win surprised many a CU golf follower because the Buffs had just lost their all-time best golfer to graduation-Hale Irwin. Irwin, a two-sport star who captained the football team as a senior defensive back, won the individual league title in 1966 by three strokes to pace the Buffs to a second-place finish. He was also co-champion in the rain-shortened, 36-hole tourney the following year with OSU's Jones.

But it was that final year of Irwin's which brought prominence to Colorado golf. The current pro standout won the 70th annual NCAA Championships over such future touring luminaries as Johnny Miller, Hubert Green, Jerry Heard and Rick Massengale.

Irwin continues to be an authoritative force with the PGA. He is just one of a handful of players who have won over \$8 million on the Tour. He was won over 30 major tournaments, including the U.S. Open three times (1974, 1979, 1990), between the PGA and Senior PGA tours.



The 1992-93 Buffaloes, featuring among others, future pros Jonathan Kaye and Scott Petersen and two-time Big Eight champion Bobby Kalinowski.

DID YOU KNOW?... that former CU golfer **Jonathan Kaye** owns the PGA Tour record for the most improvement from one round to the next? At the 1999 Bob Hope Classic he shot a second round 83 but came back with a 62 in the third round. The 21 stroke improvement is a PGA record.

Irwin, though, wasn't the first CU golfer to make it big on the pro tour. Dale Douglass, a 1959 graduate, also made his professional mark after college.

Douglass rarely lost an individual match throughout his collegiate career and was one of the Big Eight's top stars his senior year, finishing fifth in the league championships. As a professional, Douglass' best year was 1969 when he won both the Azalea and Kemper Opens. The two-time president of the Tournament Players Association also won the 1970 Phoenix Open. Most recently, Douglass has made it big on the PGA Seniors Tour, becoming one of its top money winners.

For several years in the Big Eight, the Colorado golf team played second fiddle to Oklahoma State as a powerful foe. After suffering poor finishes in 1973 and 1974, Mark Simpson joined with the legendary Les Fowler to lead the Buffs to a third place in '75 and second in '76. Simpson then took over the reins of the program in January, 1977, and would lead the Buffs to 11 NCAA tournament appearances and 13 first-division finishes in conference action, including a trio of runnerup efforts.

Simpson's first star recruit, Steve Jones, also has made it big on the PGA Tour, winning three tournaments in 1989 alone and the 1996 U.S. Open.

Simpson has coached seven all-Americans and 15 all-conference players.

In 1994 another Simpson recruit, Bobby Kalinowski, joined Irwin as a two-time Big Eight champion.

In 1996, one of the most powerful collegiate golf conferences was born out of the formation of the Big 12 Conference, which consisted of all members of the old Big Eight and four members of the disbanded Southwest Conference. The conference has averaged five teams in the Top 25 since its inception, with Colorado often included in that mix.

CU returned to the NCAA Championship finals in 1999 after a five-year absence in stunning fashion. In the NCAA Central Regional on the Ohio State campus, the Buffs pulled off the second largest rally in the 11-year history of the regional format. CU climbed from 18th to 10th place on the final day, and then won a playoff on the first hole against Kent State to advance to the national finals.

The Buffaloes returned as a regular member of the nation's Top 50 during the 1999-2000 season, and have climbed as high as No. 10 in the polls over the last decade. In 2001-02, the Buffs had one of their best years in tying for 14th in the NCAA Championship Finals. The 2003-04 team won the Western Intercollegiate, the first team win in four years, and set a school record for stroke average both overall (73.77) and the spring (73.71).

Colorado has appeared in the NCAA Finals 15 times and in the Championships 27 times overall; on 14 other occasions, CU has been represented by at least one individual.

Backlund NCAA Golf Medalist

Buff Ace Fires 137 For Record

By KALIF SHORE
Senior Staff Sports Writer
QUADRAID SPECIAL—June 25, 1953. Merle Backlund, University of Colorado senior, sportswoman, a field of 137 golfers in the 1953 NCAA Championship. Backlund's record-breaking 137 in the N. C. A. A. golf tournament was a record-breaking 137 in the N. C. A. A. golf tournament.

The first individual national title in Colorado golf history, as the late Merle Backlund was the medalist in the 1953 NCAA meet.

Tragedy hit the program in 2005, as on December 5, Simpson passed away after a valiant yearlong battle against cancer. Ironically, he would coach the Buffaloes for the exact same amount of time as Fowler, his predecessor and coach. The duo combined to coach 58 seasons for the school. The legacy the two created was one the administration looked to continue when Roy Edwards was named just the third full-time head coach in CU history.

Edwards is his ninth season and he helped usher the program into the nation's toughest golf conference when the Buffaloes joined the Pac-12 in 2011. In his third season, he coached CU to a second place finish in the Big 12—CU's first runner-up conference finish since Simpson's teams did so in 1979, 1980 and 1981. And in his eighth year – Colorado's third in the Pac-12 – he led the Buffs to a fourth place effort in its league meet, beating four top 30 teams in the process.



Hale Irwin and Steve Jones came back to Boulder in 1997 and put on a clinic for the current Buffalo team.