



Woelk: Buffs give back all year round

By Neill Woelk

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Every week, at least a few University of Colorado students run into some problems, ranging from the minor to the major.

Only a few see their names in the newspaper -- unless they happen to be CU athletes.

Then, no matter how minor the charge, it's considered major news.

Those of us on this side of the keyboard consider it a relatively equitable arrangement. Athletes are public figures. They get their names in the paper when they score a touchdown or a basket, when they run fast or win a tournament. They are praised publicly when they do well.

The flip side, of course, is that their misdeeds also become public. They find their names in headlines they don't want their mothers to read.

That's the trade-off.

But there's another side to being a CU athlete that most folks don't see -- the side that gives back to the community. You won't read too many headlines concerning these stories, but to the people they affect, they are very important indeed.

Virtually every CU athlete takes part in community service projects every year. Football coach Dan Hawkins requires every player to commit to at least four hours a year. Other programs have similar requirements.

It may not sound like much -- until you add up how much time each of us committed to similar projects in the last year.

Then it becomes a little more impressive.

The projects are as varied in scope as the athletes who partake. They range from reading with school children to visiting the elderly; from visiting a safehouse to help provide a positive role model for kids to fundraising for breast cancer research.

The projects are important to the coaches and the student-athletes. Not only do they strengthen ties to the community, but they serve as invaluable life experiences for the student-athletes.

Some coaches have even provided added incentive for the athletes. For instance, men's golf coach Roy Edwards broke his team up into three "pods." The team with the most community service hours between Nov. 1 and Feb. 1 will be rewarded with a 2-shot bonus they can use throughout the spring in team qualifying events.

So, here are some stories you don't usually have the chance to read, just a few examples of the projects CU athletes

have completed in the past year:

The women's tennis team hosted a day-long event in which the players played tennis with members of the community. Over the last four years, the event has raised more than \$66,000 for the HealthLinks Foundation and the Boulder Community Hospital Foundation.

The men's basketball team spent a weekend delivering "goody baskets" to the elderly. They delivered the baskets, then spent the afternoon talking with residents.

Members of the football team helped construct the traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall; volunteered for the Emergency Family Assistance Association in Boulder; and spent an evening with patients from the Craig Rehabilitation Hospital.

Other CU athletes from all sports participated in the Coats for Colorado drive, collecting warm clothing for a local church; helped with the Buffalo Hugs project, visiting Children's Hospital in Denver to spend time with patients and their families; and took part in Read with the Buffs, a literacy promotion program in local elementary schools.

The men's golf team participated in a fundraising event for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Soccer players and football players assisted with a Halloween party for disabled adults in Denver.

Football players and soccer players helped with the Safe House Alliance, visiting with kids and mothers who have been victims of domestic abuse, where they provided role-modeling, mentorship and companionship to clients.

Volleyball players went to Denver to pack books to be shipped to Kenya.

Women's basketball players helped sort items for silent auction to aid the EFAA.

Student-athletes from all teams participate in various sport programs (bowling, swimming, volleyball, etc.) with Special Olympic athletes of the Boulder area. At the end of the year, the student-athletes also attend the annual banquet.

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee each year helps sponsor a Holiday Angel Tree that has the names of local needy children. Athletic department staff and student-athletes sponsor a child and purchase and wrap gifts for them for the holidays.

There are plenty more. This is just a sampling of the projects. You won't hear about the vast majority of them, you won't know the names of the student-athletes who participated, and you won't see their names in the headlines for doing good work for their community.

But they are there.

So, the next time you read about one CU student-athlete running into problems, remember the dozens of others who have given. Remember that there are hundreds of folks in this community whose year was a little better because of some help from CU's athletes.

Then, remember this: Every CU student-athlete who participates in the community service projects learns a life lesson, one they will take with them the rest of their lives.

Guaranteed, it's the kind of lesson the vast majority of CU students don't take the time to study.



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