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## Helfrich puts work before interview

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich insisted to Oregon officials that his interview for a similar position within that program be delayed until after CU's spring practices conclude.

Colorado's spring game is Saturday. CU announced Tuesday night that Helfrich, who also coaches the Buffaloes' quarterbacks, will interview with the Ducks sometime next week.

"My plan was to talk to them after finishing up the spring stuff here," Helfrich said Wednesday. "It was important to me to finish up what we've been doing this spring."

The offensive coordinator position at Oregon became vacant March 13 when head coach Mike Bellotti announced he was retiring after 14 seasons to become the school's athletic director. Bellotti's handpicked successor, Oregon offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, was announced as the new head coach at the same time Bellotti stepped down.

The succession plan had been revealed Dec. 2, but no timetable for more coaching hires was given.

Helfrich, 35, has strong ties to the University of Oregon and the state. A native of Medford, Helfrich grew up in Coos Bay and played college football at Southern Oregon, where he lettered four years as a quarterback. He began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at Oregon in 1997.

Helfrich has experience in the Pac-10 Conference. He served five seasons (2001-05) as quarterbacks coach at Arizona State.

He joined the CU staff shortly after Dan Hawkins was hired in December 2005.

"I don't want this to be a distraction to the team, and I don't think it will be," Helfrich said. "I had already informed the quarterbacks and guys on offense, and (Tuesday) we had our best practice of the spring."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or  
[tkensler@denverpost.com](mailto:tkensler@denverpost.com)

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## CU announcement about offensive coordinator unprecedented

By B.G. Brooks  
[bbbrooksrn@aol.com](mailto:bbrooksrn@aol.com)

BOULDER — Although it could have been interpreted as such, the University of Colorado's plan wasn't to "out" Mark Helfrich's interest in a coaching position at the University of Oregon.

But announcing his interest was believed to be unprecedented — at least at CU.

On its athletic department Web site (CUBuffs.com), the school disclosed Tuesday night that Helfrich, the Buffaloes' offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach since 2006, would interview with Oregon next week for its vacant offensive coordinator post.

Schools on either side of the interviewing process normally don't make such announcements, as evidenced most recently by the silence surrounding former CU running game coordinator/offensive line coach Jeff Grimes being courted by Auburn and his subsequent departure.

Other recent examples: Secondary coach Greg Brown was wooed by South Florida for a co-defensive coordinator position, which Brown turned down; CU receivers coach Eric Kiesau also was approached by Oregon about a similar position and said no.

In both of those cases, CU — as it has in countless other scenarios involving staffers being approached by another program — remained mum.

Why is the Helfrich saga different?

Dave Plati, CU's associate athletic director for athletic media relations, said Wednesday that coach Dan Hawkins wanted to quell any "rumors and speculation" that might leak out of either camp concerning Oregon's interest in Helfrich.

Plati noted that the Buffs' quarterbacks and offensive players were informed, presumably by Helfrich or Hawkins, before anything was posted on the Web site.

"Hawk just wanted to get it out there . . . and that's what he told Oregon," Plati said, adding that Hawkins believes "it's a pretty awkward time to be looking for an offensive coordinator."

Oregon is in the market for one because former offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly officially succeeded longtime coach Mike Bellotti on March 30, before spring practice began.

Bellotti, who coached the Ducks for 14 seasons and guided them to 12 bowls, then moved into the athletic director's chair with an eye on the next phase of his career.

For a while, it was uncertain whether Kelly would serve as his own offensive coordinator — something Bellotti did quite well for a while.

Kelly, 45, was hired by Bellotti in 2007 to replace Gary Crowton, another spread, no-huddle devotee who left Oregon for Louisiana State. Before leaving Eugene, Crowton recommended Kelly to Bellotti — never mind that Kelly never had been a head coach and the last entry on his resume was Division I-AA New Hampshire.

But Kelly knows offensive football, and Helfrich, Arizona State's quarterbacks coach for five seasons before Hawkins called, must have been even more flattered to hear from the head Duck.

Will Helfrich take the job if offered?

CU insiders' opinions appear split. Some say Helfrich is comfortable in Boulder, likes his situation, his players and the Buffs' chances for success in 2009. Others point to the longterm security CU assistant coaches lack minus multi-year contracts, and Helfrich having deep Northwest roots — he was born in Medford, Ore., played at Southern Oregon and was a graduate assistant on the Ducks staff in 1997.

If Helfrich leaves CU, Hawkins is left to locate another offensive coordinator at an inopportune time. He has already spent spring drills breaking in a new offensive line coach, but Denver Johnson had the benefit of acclimating himself to the offense and his players through 15 spring practices.

A new offensive coordinator wouldn't have that luxury. Plus, unless Hawkins promoted from within, Helfrich's replacement would inherit two quarterbacks he'd never seen take a live snap.

Even before the Ducks intervened, August promised to be an interesting and revealing month for Buffs football. Now, it could go way beyond interesting.



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