



CU, CSU mulling 10-year deal for football series

Playing game in Denver makes agreement complicated

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — Colorado and Colorado State athletic directors continue to talk periodically about the future of the football series between the two schools, and they are discussing a 10-year extension beginning in 2011.

Both Colorado's Mike Bohn and Colorado State's Paul Kowalczyk would like to have a deal done before the start of the coming season, which begins for both teams on Sept. 6 on national television at Folsom Field.

This is the second year in a row the schools moved the game to Sunday to make sure it was nationally televised. Both men and the coaches they oversee would prefer to schedule the grudge match for a more traditional Saturday, but with each program producing inconsistent results lately, they must take what they can get.

"I would like to think that ABC or ESPN would like to televise the game nationally at some point when both programs are back to where they should be," Kowalczyk said. "For now, I love Fox and I think the fact they are stepping up for the second year in a row to put this on nationally is very significant for both of our programs."

It will be the first time in three years the game has been played in Boulder and only the third time it has been on one of the two campuses since 1997. The 2010 game is tentatively scheduled to be played in Fort Collins, but that could change if a new agreement is reached. Kowalczyk was asked this week if he remains committed to playing the Buffs in Fort Collins next year.

"If I don't, I will be committed," he joked. "Right now, that's the way it stands."

Both athletic directors believe playing the game in Denver at Invesco Field at Mile High each year is best for the financial health of their departments. Making it happen every year during a 10-year agreement is tricky.

Colorado is faced with at least two years in that span in which it would have only five home games in Boulder if it played the Rams in Denver. Those years are 2012 and 2015. The Buffs will likely have to rework their future schedules to make a long-term deal with the Rams work.

"We've made significant progress but the process isn't complete," Bohn said. "We have a good, healthy working relationship with Colorado State. We're particularly pleased with the leadership and support of the athletic department up there. We have great confidence in where the process is headed."

CU has promised its fans no fewer than six home games per season. The pledge led the Bohn bringing the game back to Boulder this year and Kowalczyk retaliating by vowing to play in Fort Collins next year even though doing so will likely cost the Rams hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He said the difference between playing in Denver and playing in Fort Collins at Hughes Stadium (capacity 34,400) is approximately \$600,000 to \$800,000 depending on the year. CU also makes significantly more with the game in Denver.

Kowalczyk said the length of the next agreement with CU is still being negotiated and is not guaranteed to span 10 years, but as far as he is concerned, the longer the agreement the better.

"Ideally, it would be nice for both schools to have this on their schedules ad infinitum," Kowalczyk said. "That lets everybody know that year in and year out, we're going to play. I think that helps both schools from a sponsorship standpoint because there is a long-term commitment. I think it helps our fan base. It enhances the rivalry, which we want to keep on a friendly basis. There is too much animosity at this point in my estimation. It needs to be a good, solid, friendly, in-state rivalry. So, yeah, there are definitely benefits to longer rather than shorter, but who knows how that is all going to shake out at this point."

Kowalczyk said financial concerns are just one reason to play the game in Denver. CSU has more than 70,000 alumni in the city and being in Denver for the weekend provides an opportunity for the program and administrators to connect with those people.

Some CU partisans contend that because the Buffs play in a superior conference with a larger stadium and are located closer to Denver, the Rams need the game much more than the Buffs do. CSU has acknowledged that fact contractually if not verbally in the past by agreeing to a 55-45 split in revenue, which will likely continue with any new deal.

But Kowalczyk said he doesn't agree with the idea that either side depends on the game more than the other. He believes it is vital for both schools and for college football fans in the state.

"I don't agree with it," he said. "I think it's important for the state and for both schools to have a real in-state rivalry. I think both schools are outstanding institutions. They both have their niches, they both serve their audiences and likewise with the sports programs. We're both Bowl Subdivision schools, and I think both schools deserve a chance to play it out on the field."

Kowalczyk said he is intrigued with the idea of moving the game to a point later in the season when many of the best rivalries in the college game are played, but he also believes the buildup to the game in late summer coinciding with students returning to campus is good for the series.

He noted both schools already have late-season rivalry games within conference. The Buffs always play Nebraska on the Friday after Thanksgiving and the Rams have the border war with Wyoming in November as well.

Asked if he and Bohn had discussed adding any significant wrinkles to the build up to the game or the game-day experience, Kowalczyk joked, "We are talking about bringing in the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders."



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