



CU's Plati to be recognized for 25 years of service

CU SID developed several new concepts for keeping statistics

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — Midway through his freshman year at Colorado in the late 1970s, a friend of Dave Plati's noticed his knack with numbers and talent for picking out often overlooked subtleties within almost any sporting event.

Plati's pal tagged his buddy with the nickname "Stats." It has stood the test of time.

Stats worked in the CU sports information office as a student under Mike Moran and then Tim Simmons. He also had close relationship with the late Fred Casotti, CU's former longtime sports information director for whom the press box in Folsom Field is named.

It was the perfect position for Plati, and he enjoyed every minute of it. Before he graduated, he worked for the AAA Denver Bears when he was a senior at CU. After graduation, he also worked as a traveling NBA statistician with Turner Broadcasting while continuing to help out at CU.

His time with the Bears in the summer of 1982 was his only time away from CU. He returned the middle of the 1982 fall semester to take a job as John Clagett's assistant in the SID's office, making \$12,000 a year. In 1984, he took over for Clagett as the school's sports information director.

Since Plati began his duties at CU in 1978, six different football coaches, six men's basketball coaches and five athletic directors, along with thousands of student-athletes and hundreds of fellow employees, have come to know his passion for recording the achievements and pitfalls of the Buffs.

Plati will begin his 26th year as Colorado's sports information director this fall and his 32nd year with the athletic department overall, and he is finally receiving some recognition for all of his hard work spanning those three decades.

Later this month, Plati and 12 of his peers from around the nation will be honored by the College Sports Information Directors of America for 25 years of service in the profession. Plati's longtime counterpart at Colorado State, Gary Ozzello, is also, fittingly, being honored.

Plati is the only person remaining in the CU athletic department who worked in the department back to the 1970s. His experience and length of service qualifies him as the department historian.

He has published two books about CU football and is a fountain of information regarding just about anything related to CU sports in the past 50 years.

"I'm proud that I can answer most questions about our history, and if I can't answer it, I'm pretty good about being able to find the answer somebody might have," he said.

He is much more than an answer man. In many ways, he is a watchdog over all things black, silver and gold.

Senior women's administrator Ceal Barry, the legendary former women's basketball coach, has been in the athletic department just five months fewer than Plati. Despite their length of service together, Barry and Plati haven't collaborated on many projects. But that didn't stop him from looking out for her program.

While watching a women's NCAA Tournament game, in which the Buffs were playing Villanova in 2003, Plati took offense to the way the Colorado program was portrayed by one of the announcers. He wrote a letter to the network and the individual to set the record straight.

"In a nutshell, that's Dave," Barry said. "He's loyal and he cares about CU, and he's not going to see us get discounted or cut-rate service."

Barry now works in the media on occasion as an analyst for men's and women's Big 12 basketball games. She benefits from tidbits of random information and history Plati will provide during broadcasts.

"He just has that little twinkle in his eye, that little smile. Kind of like, 'Nobody would be able to pick this out,'" Barry said. "He just takes pride in what he does."

Some would call Plati's a thankless job. It requires patience, tolerance and accuracy.

He has toiled all these years in the same small office just outside Balch Fieldhouse, with walls and shelves stuffed with mementos, pictures and books chronicling the history of CU sports -- with a few nods to his love of music.

Many of his assistants and students have gone on to success in the same business, including members of the Denver Broncos, Baltimore Ravens and CSU media relations staffs.

Curtis Snyder learned under Plati when he was a student at CU in the late 1990s. He worked as an assistant SID for five years and then left for five years to work at Duke. He recently returned when he heard Plati had an opening.

"It's great working for him," Snyder said. "He doesn't micro-manage us. He let's us do what we need to do. He's been doing this so long you just try to siphon a little of what's in his brain."

Plati has contributed to his profession and to the concept of stat keeping in groundbreaking ways.

He was the first person to begin tracking what football teams did inside the 20-yard line. He did so in his statistician roles with the Buffs and the Denver Broncos in the early 1980s and eventually the concept of the red zone became an integral part of the game at all levels.

"I always had this propensity to say, 'Let's come up with some unique stuff to chart and see how we can use it in notes and see if it helps the coaches,'" he said.

Plati also began keeping track of first-downs earned, expanded punting stats and average starting field

position. Because he did them for both the Buffs and Broncos, the NFL eventually began tracking many of the same categories.

Plati began his professional career with the Denver Bears minor league baseball team. He believes he was one of the first to begin tracking batting average with runners in scoring position and strikeouts with runners in scoring position.

He almost didn't end up at CU after the Texas Rangers expressed an interest in him, largely due to Mark Holtz, the Rangers' radio voice who had earlier served as KOA's voice of the Denver Bears and CU basketball.

"I firmly believe I was the first to track average with men in scoring position back in 1982," he said. "I was even keeping foul balls with two strikes. That's the only one I don't see, and baseball is keeping everything imaginable."

Watching Plati work during a CU or Broncos football game can be a dizzying affair.

Plati works between four different sheets of paper on each play, collecting and tracking various statistics. He believes it is probably his best talent of all the things he does.

Plati has hundreds of stories to share from his time at CU. Some are heroic tales. Many are inspirational. Others are sorrowful or even tragic. It's obviously difficult for him to whittle down the list to a few favorites, but when asked for three or four experiences that have stuck with him, he offers a handful from the Bill McCartney era in football.

Sitting in the audience with the late Ben Gregory in the Downtown Athletic Club in New York in 1994 watching Rashaan Salaam win the Heisman Trophy is first.

"We both probably jumped five feet in the air, hugging each other and just crying," he said.

Another fond memory is also the only time Plati knew ahead of time that an athlete had won a national award. He escorted former defensive back Chris Hudson to the Thorpe Award ceremony.

Hudson hadn't prepared any kind of speech because he didn't believe he would win. Plati agonized over how to get Hudson to prepare without ruining the moment his name would be announced. He eventually convinced him to put some thoughts down on paper with this approach.

"Pretend it's a job interview. You wouldn't go to a job interview thinking you're not going to get the job. Be sure you have something to say," Plati said. "I kind of tricked him into that. That was the longest 10 hours, probably, of my professional life. I had to shut up."

The 1990 national championship in football is another obvious choice, but Plati remembers it for other reasons other than the fulfillment of a dream years in the making.

Before the game, McCartney had asked Plati to tell sideline reporter and former NFL great O.J. Simpson that he was not happy Simpson had revealed the Buffs' hotel switch the night before the game.

Simpson exploded in anger at Plati, but came back five minutes later to ask for help with something in a mild, professional manner.

"I remember walking away from that conversation going, 'This guy is psycho,'" he said.

Plati said he instantly recalled the dramatic shift in Simpson's demeanor a few years later while watching on television as a white Ford Bronco motored down a Southern California freeway, carrying Simpson, who was alleged to have committed a double murder.

Plati also remembers the national championship for the look of bewilderment he says he saw in McCartney's eyes when he had to tell the legendary CU coach that the Buffs did not win the national title in the coaches' poll.

There are others he hesitates to leave out. Kordell Stewart and Michael Westbrook making a miracle connection in Michigan. A comeback victory in the 1981 homecoming game with the late Derek Singleton scoring the winning 2-point conversion against Oklahoma State. Also, beating Nebraska 62-36 in 2001.

Singleton is just one of many former athletes, coaches and administrators who have died during Plati's tenure. He misses them all, especially one of his closest friends, former CU golf coach Mark Simpson, who lost a brave fight with cancer a few years ago.

"I don't think this place has been the same since Mark passed away," he said.

Perhaps the most accurate portrayal of the true Dave Plati came in his office this week. After taking more than an hour from a busy day to spend with two reporters wanting to talk about his career, Plati thanked the scribes for their time.

As the last was walking out the door, Plati said, "Hey, if you can cut six or eight inches out of whatever you're going to write and give it to one of our student-athletes, it wouldn't bother me a bit. I'm just a behind the scenes guy."



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Woelk: Plato has always been man with the answers

By Neill Woelk
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BOULDER, Colo. — There's a general rule of thumb for anyone who covers Colorado athletics and has a question concerning history, statistics or anything else happening on the Hill.

Call Plato.

If Dave Plati doesn't know the answer, he'll research it. If Dave Plati can't research it, the question can't be answered.

Plati -- "Plato" to those who know him -- has spent more than three decades working for the Colorado athletic department. Officially, this is his 25th year as CU's Sports Information Director, but he began working in the office the day he arrived as a freshman from New York in 1978 and never left.

Since then, he's spent roughly 10,000 days on the CU campus.

(Hint: don't challenge that number. In the 30 years I've known Dave, I've learned at least one thing. Don't ever, ever question him on his numbers. Statistics are his gospel, and the Book of Dave is the final Word. In the time it takes most of us to calculate a pitcher's earned run average, he'll calculate the pitcher's ERA, the strikeouts per inning, the hits per nine innings, the strikeouts-to-walks ratio and the opponents' batting average -- and his numbers will be correct down to the last decimal. Then he'll wait for you to finish.)

Plati is respected nationally by his peers and sports writers who have leaned on his statistical prowess for decades. He has created statistics that are now a part of everyday lingo, and he has spent countless hours researching and updating CU's record books.

His record books and press guides are considered to be the industry standard.

"Everybody has an 'escape' in their life," Plati said. "One of my escapes has been creating history, in the sense of creating records that have never been kept. I thoroughly enjoy sitting down and going through newspaper accounts, old press releases -- any record -- and compiling a comprehensive, accurate statistical account."

That means long hours holed up in the tiny office he's occupied since the day he took the job as CU's SID in 1984.

Did I say long hours? From personal experience, I know that if someone needs a question answered at midnight ... or 1 a.m. ... or 2 a.m. ... during football season, Dave is easy to find.

Call his office. He'll be there.

And, he takes it as a personal affront on those rare occasions he is stumped.

"I honestly feel bad if someone calls with a question we can't answer," he said. "It's why it's so important to keep records."

But Plati gets his biggest sense of fulfillment from helping CU's student athletes achieve success. In that vein, he has provided the statistics that have helped CU football players gather in a Heisman Trophy, two Butkus Award trophies, two Thorpe Awards, and one Doak Walker, Walter Camp, Ray Guy and John Mackey honor.

Four head football coaches and dozens of assistants have leaned on Plati for statistics, counsel and as simply a sounding board since he was named SID in 1984. He also still personally attends to CU's golf and ski teams (two of his loves), and he has mentored dozens of interns and assistants who have gone on to enjoy successful careers.

"I do feel proud of what I've been able to accomplish, and that is helping the people around me succeed," he said. "I hope that's at least part of what people remember."

Although he's just 49 years old, his longevity in the department qualifies him as a graybeard, and he has assumed the role of department historian, a mantle once held by one of his mentors, the late Fred Casotti.

"Fred used to say that historian is a position that demands great age," Plati said. "That about sums it up."

Still, when he walked into the Colorado SID's office in 1978, he never thought he'd be walking back into that same office on a daily basis more than 30 years later.

"I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up," he says with a chuckle. "Maybe I'll figure it out one of these days."

Until then, though, he'll continue to be the man with the answers -- someone CU's athletic department is very lucky to have.

The list

A short list of CU student and department assistants who worked for Dave Plati and moved on to careers in the sports world:

Pakalani Bello, Hawaii

Ellen Brandon, NBA, Disney Sports

Chris DiConna, Cal

Chris Fowler, ESPN

Zak Gilbert, Colorado State

Pat Gleason, Baltimore Ravens

Brendan McNicholas, Colorado Avalanche

Eric Schubert, Denver Broncos

Mike Strauss, Kansas

Lisa Vad, Western Athletic Conference

Adam Woullard, Green Bay Packers

Damon Zier, Colorado Avalanche



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