



Bohn to tour Nike factories

CU athletic director will leave next month for trip to Vietnam

By Kyle Ringo

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Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn will travel to Vietnam next month to get a firsthand look at working conditions in Nike Inc. factories there.

Bohn is one of a handful of college administrators making the trip, which is paid for by Nike and expected to last about a week.

It is the fifth time in the past six years the company has funded such a fact-finding mission. It does so in an effort to combat allegations that it operates sweatshops overseas where much of its apparel and gear is made by workers paid as subcontractors.

"It is an opportunity for me to be more informed and be able to speak in an educated fashion about their progress and commitment and find out why and how Nike is emerging as a leader in those issues," Bohn said.

Colorado has had a licensing contract with Nike Inc. since 1995. Bohn negotiated a 10-year, \$20 million extension with Nike in 2005. The deal runs through 2016 and is believed to be among the top-20 richest college agreements in the nation.

Nike supplies CU with uniforms and equipment for all 16 of its intercollegiate athletic programs. Former Colorado athletic director Dick Tharp made a similar trip during his tenure at the school, which ended in late 2004.

Tim Hillman, a CU graduate student and a member of the Coalition Against Sweatshop Abuses (CASA), said he was encouraged to hear about Bohn's trip. He said he hopes Bohn will ask tough questions to both Nike representatives and foreign officials about working conditions in the factories.

CASA has held several forums and rallies on-campus in recent years to bring attention to working conditions it says are oppressive and immoral. Hillman said universities and their athletic departments should not perpetuate such conditions through multi-million dollar licensing agreements.

"I guess, once again, I'm encouraged to see that the university is following through with what I think is its responsibility to ensure that its business partners, in this case Nike, are being socially responsible," Hillman said.

Hillman grew up in Portland, Ore., not far from Nike headquarters. He said he has never visited one of the foreign factories himself but he has studied the issue intensely and several of his fellow CASA members have made trips to see the factories for themselves.

Hillman said he is hoping Bohn will invite former St. John's soccer coach Jim Keady back to campus for another forum once Bohn returns from his trip. Keady, who was fired by St. John's after he began speaking out about conditions in Nike factories, visited CU last spring.

"CASA would certainly like to reiterate that sweatshop abuses can be easily eliminated," Hillman said. "We're simply helping Nike to ensure that our university apparel and athletic gear is made in factories where workers, A, have the right to collectively bargain as they choose, and, B, their factories are paid enough by Nike to ensure those workers can meet their basic needs of food, shelter, health care and education for their children."

Nike has found abuses in its factories in the past and made them public through its corporate responsibility report.

Kit Morris, Nike's director of college sports marketing, told the Associated Press prior to a similar trip this year that it doesn't put any restrictions on college administrators on the trips.

"We want to be as transparent as possible during these visits, allowing our guests from the different colleges to ask any factory worker or government official any question they want," Morris told the AP.

Bohn said the trip will also strengthen CU's relationship with Nike. The company has used CU in the past as a test school for new designs and products.

"It's an opportunity to further our partnership with Nike and further some initiatives in our partnership that will be revealed in the fall," Bohn said. "It also will allow me to bring back new information to share with students and other constituent groups on campus, as well as others across the state."



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