



## 'Buffalo Bill' ropes 'em in

By Ryan Thorburn  
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BOULDER, Colo. — One of Bill Harris' unofficial duties as the Colorado Alumni C Club director is to give current Buffs a warning:

Soak up every moment of being a student-athlete. This experience will be over before you know it.

"I always say to them, 'I'll see you in four years. Enjoy it because these are the fastest four years of your life,'" Harris said during a recent interview with the Camera inside his office, which is decorated with photographs autographed by some of his favorite CU athletes. "Just last year, George Hypolite said to me, 'Oh my God, I'm a C club man.'"

Harris, who recently turned 67, will retire from CU at the end of the month.

Since accepting the position in May 2001, the C Club's active membership -- the number of ex-Buffs paying their dues -- has increased from about 450 to well over 1,000.

During Harris' tenure, he has helped put together six CU Hall of Fame ceremonies, opened the C Club suite at Folsom Field and expanded the popular Living Legends program.

"Bill has an unequivocal passion and affection for the entire institution," CU athletic director Mike Bohn said. "There's no question we'll miss Bill's even-keeled demeanor, professionalism, work ethic and his great love for CU."

After a distinguished 25-year career as a healthcare executive in his native New Jersey, Harris moved back to Boulder eight years ago with his wife, Susan, when their kids -- son Trevor and daughter Lisa -- were students at CU.

When Blake Anderson left his post as the C Club Director to go into private business, Harris was an obvious choice to fill the vacancy.

"I thought Bill would be the perfect fit for a variety of reasons," said John Meadows, an assistant athletic director at the time and a former teammate of Harris' in the early 1960s. "He was a guy who was retired with lots of energy and who gets along with everybody. And he was an older guy who wasn't looking to move on to something else."

Harris plans to stay in Boulder, where he will spend some time in the garden, fishing and playing with his grandchildren.

'Always a good time with those guys'

Harris has enjoyed developing relationships with CU letterwinners in all sports, and providing opportunities for them to return to campus.

Communicating with pioneers and legends such as Claude Walton, CU's first African-American letterwinner and the school's first All-American (1936), has been a thrill for Harris.

"Claude Walton is a very interesting guy," Harris said of Walton, a track star at CU in the 1930s who was inducted into the university's athletic hall of fame in 2008 at the age of 94. "Claude would call me and he would always pay his dues. He was an active supporting member of the C Club. When we would talk, he would never say, 'I did this or I accomplished this.' He would just ask how CU was doing and say that he loved that place."

Harris said the return of Chauncey Billups, the famous and accomplished NBA star who played at CU from 1995-97, to his native Denver has been an exciting development at the end of his tenure. The Nuggets star is a card-carrying member of the C Club.

"It has been really good for us, the whole department, and I would think the whole university," Harris said. "He's a part of the C Club and there have been a couple times we've had a chance to talk at games."

Harris, who played football at CU from 1960-63, said his favorite project was getting a chance to track down and reunite with his teammates. The list of greats from that era includes Joe Romig, Gale Weidner, Ted Woods, Charlie McBride and Jerry Hillebrand.

"That's one of the real joys of working and doing this job for nine years. My teammates were just unbelievable, and since I've been on this job I've found every one of my teammates," Harris said. "We talk so much about what went on in those days and how we all bonded and stuck together. And that's how we are today."

"That was really a great feeling to find them and learn of the accomplishments of all of the guys on that team. We all cherish that bonding moment and the racial stuff we went through. We really bonded behind all of that."

'If we couldn't stay at the same hotel ... we weren't going'

Meadows still remembers the Buffs' first team meeting in 1960 as if it happened yesterday.

"When I first met Bill was when the coaches had everyone stand up and they introduced us and said our position and where we were from," Meadows said. "I'll never forget this, they introduced him — 'Bill Harris, running back from Hackensack, New Jersey.'"

"I came out of Michigan and was sitting with Orlando Jones and Larry Douglas, two running backs from Michigan, and when Bill stood up they both looked at me and go, 'Look at the size of that dude.'"

Harris, 6-foot-2, led the team in rushing as a junior with 582 yards in 1962.

"Buffalo Bill" is 27th on the CU's all-time rushing list with 1,486 yards and 26th all-time in all-purpose yards (2,411).

Harris' favorite moment on the field came in a game that didn't feature much offense, the famous

slugfest with Nebraska in 1961 in which the Buffs escaped Lincoln with a 7-0 victory.

“We held them to no first downs in a snowy, muddy game,” Harris said. “Holding them to no first downs is just unbelievable.”

During the early part of that magical season, CU traveled down to Miami and beat the Hurricanes 9-7. The trip to the South forced the integrated Buffs to divide among racial lines the night before the game, but the players were closer than ever in the locker room.

“When we went and played Miami the black players were housed somewhere different than other players on the team,” Meadows said. “When we earned the berth to the Orange Bowl at the end of that season we all agreed: If we couldn’t stay at same hotel on Miami Beach, we weren’t going.”

The No. 6 Buffs ended up losing to No. 4 Louisiana State 25-7 in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 1, but still finished 9-2, including a 22-14 victory in Oklahoma and a 7-6 victory over No. 10 Missouri.

“We had a pretty good time,” Harris said. “Even during the bad years, there were some interesting games.”

CU finished with a 2-8 record in 1962, Sonny Grandelius’ final season, and finished 2-8 again in 1963, Eddie Crowder’s first season.

The final game of Harris’ career against Air Force had to be postponed until Dec. 7, 1963 due to the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22.

“I remember exactly where I was on campus at that time. I was in the student union on the second floor,” Harris recalled. “We were heading to training table and we got the word right in the hallway. It was unreal.”

Harris was drafted by the NFL’s New York Giants and went on to play three years in the Canadian Football League, for Ottawa in 1964 and then Calgary in 1965-66. He finished his bachelor’s degree in Education at Montclair (N.J.) State University in 1968, and then earned his master’s in both Sociology and Business from MSU in 1972.

“Spending 30 years working in hospital administration, it was a great job in a great industry and I really enjoyed that time. I had no idea that I was going to ever go back to work again,” Harris said. “But after retiring I knew that I was bored, of course I wasn’t telling anyone I was bored. And to be able to land a position here in the athletic department was a dream come true.

“I never would have thought that I would return to CU, especially to be a part of the athletic department and the university. It was just something that was a dream and it has just been great.”

Now Harris gets to slow down after enjoying the fastest years of his life all over again.



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