

College Football

Colorado’s MacIntyre wins AP Coach of the Year

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Mike MacIntyre has the reputation as a turnaround artist. Give him a program, any program, and he will transform it.

Colorado, though, had the looks of being the sort of program that not even MacIntyre could fix.

After three years that resulted in a grand total of 10 victories, MacIntyre led the 11th-ranked Buffaloes to a 10-win season, a spot in the Pac-12 Championship game and even onto the fringes of the national-title conversation for a week or two. Colorado also will make its first bowl appearance since 2007.

For that, MacIntyre is The Associated Press college football Coach of the Year. He received 109 points and 25 first-place votes from the AP college football poll panel, while Penn State’s James Franklin was second with 98 and 16. Alabama’s Nick Saban was third with 57 and 13.

“We played a lot of young guys and they worked hard and got better,” explained MacIntyre, who became the first Colorado coach to win the award since it began in 1998. “They grew into their talent and kept right on going.”

To comprehend just how far Colorado has come, it’s important to know where the Buffaloes were before MacIntyre arrived. In 2012, they led the nation in games started by true freshmen,



AP Photo/Ben Margot, File

In this Oct. 22, 2016, file photo, Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre, center, leads his team in warm up exercises before a game against Stanford, in Stanford, Calif.

got outscored by a 552-214 margin and lost a school-high 11 games that ultimately cost coach Jon Embree his job.

MacIntyre realized he was inheriting a program that had fallen on hard times. But the depths of that decline caught him off guard.

MacIntyre gradually revamped the program — just like he did at San Jose State when he inherited a 2-10 squad and in three seasons turned the Spartans into a double-digit win team.

All he needed was time and a chance to develop his talent. After going 2-25 in conference games over his first three seasons at Colorado, some publications listed him on the hot seat heading into the season.

Now, he’s one of the hottest coaches in the business.

“The Rise” — as Colorado has labeled it — has been no surprise to his players. They bought in

from the beginning. Take junior running back Phillip Lindsay. He was recruited by the previous regime and didn’t know if his scholarship would still be honored after suffering a serious knee injury in high school.

MacIntyre visited him and assured Lindsay that one day he would play a role in leading this team back to prominence. Lindsay rushed for 1,189 yards and 16 scores this season. He won’t forget that trust from MacIntyre.

He believed. His teammates believed — even as the Buffaloes struggled.

“Rome wasn’t built in one day. He just needed time to build a program,” Lindsay said. “He’s a big reason we are where we are today.”

And that’s a program trending in the right direction — with big crowds showing up again at Folsom Field. They appeared in their first conference title game — losing 41-10 to

No. 4 Washington — since 2005, when they were in the Big 12. They’re also heading to the Alamo Bowl against Oklahoma State — with a chance to become just the fourth team in school history to win 11 games.

“We’ve been making steps. Some of them were baby steps, but we were moving forward,” said MacIntyre, whose late father, George MacIntyre, was the coach at Vanderbilt from 1979 to 1985. “We weren’t going backward at all.”

This helped, too — upgrades to the athletic facilities, including a new indoor practice field. Recently, MacIntyre took the team over to their old digs, just as a reminder of how far they’ve come.

“Those young freshmen were like, ‘What’s this?’” MacIntyre recounted. “You can’t kick it high, the lights are weird. But this is what it was for us all the time.

“There might be some times we go back down there and do some morning drills like we used to and make them realize how nice we’ve got it.”

MacIntyre’s always been an emotional coach. After a win at Oregon, MacIntyre hugged his son Jay, a sophomore receiver, as he wiped away tears. His players appreciate that side of him.

“A lot of ups and downs, a lot of heartbreaks, a lot of happy times, a lot of crying over the years,” Lindsay said. “We are a figure of him. Now, you’re seeing the final product.

WEATHER: Umatilla scrambling to schedule a pair of games next week

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Umatilla has already been pushed back one day and as of now will run Saturday through Monday, though the coach did say there was a chance it could be scrapped altogether.

“But that would be brutal for us,” he said.

Both Umatilla boys and girls basketball teams were supposed to be one game into a three-day Union Christmas Tournament starting on Thursday, but school cancellations and bad road conditions nixed the trip for the Vikings. Now, Umatilla boys coach Derek Lete says that the teams are trying to line up one or two games to play next week with some other local teams to make up for it.

“Losing three games this weekend is kind of a big chunk of the seasons for us,” he said, “but us not having school next week hopefully will make it easier to get someone else scheduled.”

The Stanfield boys basketball team is also one that has been affected a bit by the closures and cancellations, as the team has now missed practice two straight days. Coach Jason Sperr said that coupling canceled practices with the delayed start of the season due to football success, his team has had just six full practices altogether now three weeks into the season.

Both Stanfield and Pilot

Rock are scheduled to host preseason tournaments this weekend, though as of press time both tournaments are still on.

Hermiston boys and girls basketball is also supposed to be in action on Saturday, with the boys hosting Hillsboro and the girls traveling to Hillsboro. But Hermiston athletic director Larry Usher said that both games would likely be canceled or moved to a later date, though a decision hadn’t yet been made.

But the weather hasn’t just affected the basketball teams either. Pendleton and Hermiston’s swim teams had its season debut meet in Baker wiped out last week due to weather, and this weekend’s trips to both La Grande and Bend are in serious doubt again.

And for teams that only had six scheduled meets before districts, the athletes are missing out on valuable competition time in regulation-sized pools and could play a factor when it comes time for districts and state qualifications.

It’s hard to tell just how much of an effect this unusual weather system will have on area teams down the stretch runs of their respective seasons, but it’s safe to say it’s worth keeping an eye on.

Contact Eric at esinger@eastoregonian.com or (541) 966-0839. Follow him on Twitter @ByEricSinger.

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