

The McCartney presence returns to the Buffaloes



Sam McKewon

Just to get this out of the way before the season really gets going, so it doesn't shock anybody once it starts happening: Colorado football is back.

And this fact can be traced back to the return of one man: Bill McCartney.

McCartney isn't back as head coach. That title goes to Gary Barnett, formerly of the Northwestern resurrection. But the McCartney presence is back, at least one that goes further than his religion.

Barnett, a former CU aide, brought McCartney in for what assistant Brian Cabral likened to a consultation in the spring.

"We've brought him back into the fold," said Cabral, who was retained by Barnett after coaching under Neuheisel.

The fold? Now *that's* a McCartney phrase. The former Buffs man was a skilled motivator in placing an us-vs.-them cloud upon his team, especially when it played Nebraska. And in the late 1980s/early 1990s, it worked; Colorado beat Nebraska three times (1986, 1989, 1990), tied them once (1991), and scared the bejesus out of the Cornhuskers several more.

After McCartney retired to involve himself in the Promise Keepers organization and Rick

Neuheisel took over in 1995, it was clear the new coach's emphasis was less on beating NU as it was creating his own legend.

Even with that laid-back approach, Colorado challenged the Huskers in every one of his four years, with far less talent in 1997 and 1998.

"Whatever might have been said by some," said Cabral, seeming to implicate Neuheisel, "the Nebraska game had never been played down within the program." Another McCartney touch.

Bill's boys were gone by 1997, and so went much of CU's success. Neuheisel had not the conviction nor the credentials to recruit, it seemed; his failure to attract a great high school quarterback haunts the team today.

It was clear enough after Neuheisel left that his lack of fire was resented by the team, especially by those who had a taste of McCartney. Stories of players verbally attacking the coach surfaced; seniors said they basically decided to revolt in 1996; they consider themselves responsible for the solid 10-2 record Colorado had that year.

So there was a four-year rift in the Rocky Mountains, with a head coach on one page, the team on another.

Consider that rift gone. Barnett intends to instill McCartney values back in the team, along with an intensity many say Neuheisel lacked outside game situations.

Cabral said McCartney will "be around" come fall. He's been around there already. Plus, Barnett brought a Thursday-night-meeting tradition that McCartney invented to give his team focus for Saturday. The defense has changed. The offense has

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changed — geared closer to a running attack that Colorado's best teams employed. River rafting and guitar playing is out.

What's in?

"Smash-mouth football," CU safety Rashidi Barnes said. "That's what we want."

Granted, Barnett deserves some credit for bringing back the old. After all, he turned around a program at Northwestern that was not only dead, but hadn't ever really been alive.

But Barnett had eight seasons to learn from one of the best in McCartney. And although it's a quiet return, the man who helped NU fans learn to loathe Colorado is back to add his personal touch. With him returns CU football.

Samuel McKewon is a senior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan senior staff writer.

Cross-country season filled with questions

BY JASON MERRIHEW
Staff writer

The Big 12 Conference is full of question marks heading into the 1999 fall cross country season.

Last year's men's Big 12 champion, Colorado, returns only two runners.

"This is a rebuilding year," Colorado Head Coach Mark Wetmore said.

In order to make a conference-title run, the Buffaloes "will have to train heroically," Wetmore said.

"We are the defending champions, but Oklahoma State will be very formidable."

Last year's second place finisher, Oklahoma State, was hit hard by graduation.

"We lost five of the seven guys that were on the team last year," Head Coach Richard Weis said. "We are a very young team."

Weis said it will take time for his team to mature and be a serious contender in the conference.

The Cowboys and the Buffaloes are not the only teams in the conference with a lack of experience.

Although Nebraska will have a very young team, Head Coach Jay Dirksen is optimistic that this club will improve from its eighth-place showing last season.

"My goal is to finish in the top half of the conference," Dirksen said.

A new leader will have to emerge for the Huskers as senior captain Tony Smith will redshirt this season. He is academically ineligible.

Iowa State has also been mentioned as one of the possible contenders in the Big 12. The Cyclones lost three letter-winners from last year, but will return six.

"Iowa State had a lot of injuries last year, and they lost a couple of kids that were pretty good kids," Weis said. "They could turn it around."

Missouri, coming off a third-place finish in the Big 12, will contend with an experienced team. The Tigers will have 10 returning lettermen this season.

Inexperience a common problem in the Big 12

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6-2 offense.

"These four (freshman) will be the core of a great team," Pettit said.

Picked to finish second in the Big 12 behind the Cornhuskers is Texas A&M, which happened to be the only team that beat NU in 1998. The Aggies finished 21-9 last year and fourth in the Big 12 (13-7).

Despite losing All-Big 12 selection Stacey Seykora, Texas A&M will be the most experienced team in the league. The Aggies are led by senior Amber Woolsey, who led the team in kills (3.58 per game) and hitting percentage last season (.290).

"A&M has five starters returning, that's the most," Texas Coach Jim Moore said. "Outside of Nebraska, I'd

say they're logically the best team, but everyone's got a chance to get in there."

Moore's Longhorns, who finished 18-2 and second in the Big 12 behind NU last season (and lost to eventual national champion Long Beach State in the regional finals), is one of those teams — picked to finish third.

Colorado is picked fourth, followed by Kansas State, Texas Tech, Baylor, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa State.

The coaches are expecting a dog-fight for the top five spots in the conference — and trips to the NCAA Tournament. The five top 25 teams all made it to the tourney last year.

"I think you're going to see a move from the bottom into the hunt from a lot of teams," Bechard said.

UT's Brown brings 'all the forces of Texas' together

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David McWilliams and John Mackovic — weren't ever able to mold the program away from Royal's image. Instead, in trying to make their own, they failed, even though each had some success on the field.

Brown did those coaches one better. He didn't try to invent his own persona. He brought back Royal's presence into the program, even bearing a physical resemblance to the former coach.

"He included as many old Texas traditions as he could think of," said Royal, who, although he doesn't admit it, helped establish many of them himself. "Before he had that first press conference, he brought all the factions, all the forces of Texas together."

For Brown, the key was getting that statewide support, said Dave Campbell, editor in chief of the magazine Texas Football, which is in its 40th year of publication.

Campbell knows football in Texas. He was around Royal, Gene Stallings and a coach named Paul "Bear" Bryant when he coached at Texas A&M.

"There are different ways to skin a cat," Campbell said in his rich Southern drawl. "And all the coaches right now, they fit their team's image. R.C. Slocum fits A&M. Spike Dykes fits Texas Tech. And Mack Brown is a perfect fit for Texas."

Longhorn fans, Campbell said, like to win. They also like to be told they're going to win. And they want their winning to look good.

Brown succeeded on all accounts in 1998. Texas went 10-3, pounded Mississippi State 41-11 in the Cotton Bowl, beat Oklahoma, Texas A&M and Nebraska and, most importantly, got halfback Ricky Williams his NCAA career rushing record and a Heisman Trophy.

"Getting Ricky back was the best recruiting job Mack's ever done," Royal said.

Brown takes those wins and parlays them into

optimism.

"I asked Darrell Royal about it when I came in," Brown said. "And he told me the great thing about this job is that there's tremendous commitment from the fans at the University of Texas and therefore great expectations."

"The bad thing about this job is that there's tremendous commitment from the University of Texas, and therefore there's expectations about this job. But we embrace those expectations."

Beyond Brown's honesty comes the ability to makes others seem important, Campbell said, no matter what person, no matter their connection to the program.

"Mack has this uncanny ability to remember names and faces perfectly," Campbell said. "He's good with the media. He develops relationships quickly. And develops them with the right people."

Campbell tells a story about Royal's former defensive coordinator and good friend, Mike Campbell, who was passed over for the coaching job after Royal retired in 1976. The UT Board of Regents deliberately shut Royal out of the decision, even though he was now the athletic director.

When Brown arrived, he embraced not only Royal but immediately had lunch with Campbell, at Royal's request. When Campbell passed away last year, Brown was at the funeral. Now, Mike Campbell's name adorns the trophy room for UT football.

"That was smart," Dave Campbell said. "Very smart."

Not only has Brown been "smart," but his situation at Texas had a bit of good fortune in the beginning. He went to a UT program that had all new facilities, thanks to Mackovic, who made the unpopular suggestion that Texas was behind the times, Campbell said. Brown also inherited Williams, the nation's best player.

And Brown inherited a comeback team.

"Four times," Royal said, "we were behind, going into our last drive and needing to score. And

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MACK BROWN
Texas head coach

we won all four of those games. That's how close our season was."

One of those wins was a 20-16 triumph at Nebraska.

College football has changed since Royal prowled the UT sidelines. Back then, Royal said, there were fewer goals. Beat Oklahoma. Beat Texas A&M. Win the Southwest Conference.

Now, with Royal's success, it's a national title that Texas fans clamor for. And Royal and the rest of the UT supporters think Brown, a coach who has never even won a conference title (thank Brown's alma mater FSU for that) can deliver it.

That's pressure Brown's ready for. "I can't wait for the pressure to get here. It's fun," Brown said. "This probably wouldn't have been a good job form 10 years ago because there's so much pressure."

"If you really sat around and thought about the pressure long enough, you'd probably throw up. But instead of hiding from it, we've embraced it."

His players have, too. Of course, Brown has said that has been his focus all along: the UT players.

"Coach Brown tells us something, and we'll follow it," sophomore quarterback Major

Applewhite said. "We've put our faith in his coaching ability."

The key is, Brown has the same faith from the normally faceless support system throughout the Lone Star state, which he has given a face to. He has a motto for the UT-record 45,000 fans who've signed for season tickets: come early, be loud, stay late, wear Orange with pride. He has a Web site: www.mackbrown.com. He has, in Royal's words, "the total package."

"If we were still out there lookin'," Royal said, "We'd have never found a better one than Mack Brown."

As his two players left the podium, Brown stood up to thank them. His right hand was extended to Applewhite. Applewhite took it. Brown's left hand rose up Applewhite's right arm, then back down, into a two-hand lock. Linebacker Anthony Hicks got the same treatment.

Brown sat back down and held his court.

"The way we have presented this year's football team is: Players have careers," he said. "Teams have years. Last year's team is now history. It was great year, a lot of fun, we've used the word magical. We'll challenge this year's team to leave their mark in 1999."

"There's 365 days in the life of a football team each year, and there's only 153 of those 365 days left ... not that anybody's counting."