



Famed CU coach Eddie Crowder dies

By Neill Woelk

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Eddie Crowder, the man who took Colorado's football program to national prominence as a coach and set the stage for one of the school's most successful eras as its athletic director, died late Tuesday. He was 77.

Crowder had been battling a blood disorder for the last few months, and was weakened by a recent fall at his home.

Crowder leaves an unmatched legacy at CU. No other man has had more of an influence on Colorado's athletic department, with that influence spanning more than four decades.

As the football coach for 11 years, Crowder led CU to a No. 3 finish in the nation in 1971, five bowl games and a 67-49-2 record, including CU's first 10-win season in 1971.

As CU's athletic director for 21 years, he took Colorado into the era of big-time college athletics. He also recovered from what he would later call his "biggest mistake" — the hiring of Chuck Fairbanks as the Buffs' football coach — to set the stage for what would become a golden era of CU athletics.

"Eddie Crowder held Colorado athletics together," said former Big Eight commissioner Chuck Neinas. "Let's be candid — Colorado has never had the resources of an Oklahoma or Nebraska.

"But in large part, they've been able to compete with those schools on a fairly regular basis because of the efforts of a guy like Eddie."

Crowder's influence is still being felt at CU.

In 1982, after the departure of Fairbanks, Crowder hired an unknown defensive assistant from Michigan. Eight years later, Bill McCartney won CU's first national championship in football.

In 1983, as he continued to reshape the department to meet Title IX requirements, Crowder hired a young coach from the University of Cincinnati to head CU's women's basketball program. Ceal Barry took CU to national prominence, winning 426 games and five conference tourney titles and making 12 NCAA Tournament appearances.

Barry is now a senior administrator in CU's athletic department.

Crowder retired as athletic director in 1984, but he continued to keep a close watch over the program. McCartney and Bill Marolt — the man who replaced Crowder as athletic director — called upon him as a confidant on many occasions, and current CU coach Dan Hawkins recently said it was an "amazing privilege" to have Crowder as an advisor.

“Coach Crowder has been a real blessing in my life,” Hawkins said. “In such a short time he became a great mentor to me. Coach was a giver of his time, his wisdom, insight, and love. He had such a fondness for CU and Colorado football, particularly all of his former players. I will miss his gentle manner and the way he gracefully slid in and out of my daily existence. Eddie Crowder is truly one of the most special people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. We will all miss him daily, but he will be there with us each time we run out behind Ralphie onto Folsom Field.”

Crowder played for, coached with and matched wits against some of college football’s legendary names.

A native of Arkansas City, Kan., he grew up in Muskogee, Okla. He was an All-American quarterback for the Sooners under Bud Wilkinson, and played with 1952 Heisman Trophy winner Billy Vessels.

He served as an assistant under Red Blaik at Army and then worked for Wilkinson at Oklahoma before taking his first — and only — head coaching job, at Colorado in 1963.

He replaced Bud Davis, who had coached just one year after taking over the program on the heels of a scandal that chased Sonny Grandelius out in 1961.

Crowder's first contract was a four-year deal that paid him \$15,000 per year.

One year later, Crowder also assumed duties as CU’s athletic director, replacing the retired Harry Carlson.

Crowder built a winner in Boulder. He began by recruiting local stars such as Hale and Phil Irwin and Dick and Bobby Anderson (all from Boulder High), and soon expanded his recruiting base across the nation.

By 1965, he had a winning team. CU then enjoyed eight consecutive winning seasons under Crowder, a stretch that included the nation’s No. 3 ranking in 1971 and five bowl berths at a time when the number of bowl games was roughly one-third of the number that exist today.

Crowder coached against some of the game’s legends. The list includes Alabama’s Bear Bryant, Ohio State’s Woody Hayes, Penn State’s Joe Paterno and Nebraska’s Bob Devaney, and he owned at least one win over each of those coaches.

Crowder was also a master recruiter. He coached nine All-Americans at CU, 33 All-Big Eight selections, five academic All-Americans and 37 NFL draft choices. That list included such stars as Dave Logan, John Stearns, Cliff Branch, Cullen Bryant and Herb Orvis.

In all, Crowder recruited and coaches seven first-round NFL picks.

And, Crowder had outstanding assistants. Among the coaches who received their early tutelage under Crowder were Don James, Jim Mora, Jerry Claiborne and Steve Ortmayer.

James would go on to win a national title at Washington; Mora was a successful NFL head coach; Ortmayer was a longtime NFL assistant and served as general manager of the San Diego Chargers; and Claiborne was head coach at Virginia Tech, Maryland and Kentucky.

After a disappointing 5-6 finish in 1973, Crowder stepped down as football coach and but remained as athletic director. He hired Bill Mallory as CU’s next coach, but Mallory’s early success with the players

Crowder recruited dwindled when those players left.

Crowder fired Mallory after the 1978 season and lured Fairbanks away from the NFL's New England Patriots, a hire that made national news.

The Fairbanks Era, however, was a disaster at CU. It resulted in NCAA probation and a financial crisis that forced Crowder to cut seven sports in 1980.

"It was a tremendous disappointment," Crowder said in a 1983 interview with the Camera. "To have to reduce the number of sports at our university was a terrible setback. Then there was the NCAA investigation ... it was just a cloud that hung over our heads and didn't seem to want to go away."

But Crowder had one more rebuilding effort remaining. He hired McCartney, a move that was met with a collective yawn at the time but one that proved to be one of the most important hires in CU history.

At the same time, he merged the CU men's and women's athletic departments into one group and hired Barry, beginning an era that saw CU's women's athletic programs take dramatic strides forward.

Those moves, plus some financial belt tightening that helped put the department back into the black, allowed him to retire in 1984.

He handed the reins over to Marolt — a former CU skier — who then helped usher CU into one of the most successful eras in school history.



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