

North Dakota should take notice of Bohl's Wyoming decision

On Dec. 2, Wyoming sports beat writer Robert Gagliardi wrote an article about potential coaching choices for Wyoming's football team. Gagliardi



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For Bakken Breakout
Weekly

listed about 15 candidates, but the one featured as the front runner was North Dakota State's Craig Bohl. On Dec. 7, that speculation hit North Dakota social media. And Dec. 8, it became official.

This sports news story has literally dominated the North Dakota media, including as the lead story on the local nightly news. Front page of newspapers, too. NDSU football is big business for the state, just like oil and gas. Quite honestly, I feel pretty confident stating that oil and gas are major factors in coach Bohl's decision, and he might not even realize it. Although, something tells me he does.

In the same manner technology is driving the oil boom in North Dakota, energy companies in Wyoming are driving coach Bohl's decision. My reason is simple. The energy industry has been the economic engine in American football the same way the beer industry has been the social lubricant for Americans. Check out the Biesiot Activity Center in Dickinson. A pretty nice facility for a Division III football team. Or ask Eric Dickerson how many Trans Ams oil and gas bought his teammates at SMU before the NCAA stepped in. And who can forget former Oklahoma Sooner, Brian Bosworth, who made more money tanning on his Corvette while watching an oil derrick, than a tenured professor.

During the Wyoming press conference, Bohl referenced the amount of resources Wyoming is set to put into the program. Keep in mind, these resources are real and large. We're talking oil, gas, coal and good ol' boy resources. Dick Cheney and Brown & Root resources. Oil, gas and coal have literally built the NCAA football infrastructure. Check out any college or community's infrastructure focus of an energy town.

In fact, Jerry Jones was a failing businessman until he started an oil extraction company in Arkansas. It was phenomenally successful and, about 20 years later, he bought the Dallas Cowboys. The

simple fact is this: Oil and football have had a long marriage, and the University of Wyoming is set up to capitalize on a limited period of economic activity in the state. Let me explain further.

Currently Wyoming is on the brink of an oil explosion like North Dakota experienced in about 2008.

According to the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources, North Dakota produced 32,415,699 barrels of oil in 2000. In 2012, that number increased exponentially to 242,276,054. The same horizontal drilling technology that made the Bakken boom possible could guide a new era of mineral development in the Powder River Basin.

"I think that the status of things in the Powder River Basin (a formation in Wyoming) is not unlike how things were in the Bakken a number of years ago," said Grant Black, supervisor of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

The numbers in Wyoming are already proving that the theory of horizontal drilling will work in reality. Oil production in Johnson County increased by 171 percent from the first nine months of 2012 to the first nine months of 2013. The most up-to-date data for 2013 is through September, however, the county's 2013 oil production had already surpassed 2012 production by 226,681 barrels.

Oil companies are taking notice of the Powder River Basin and are making plans to expand their exploration in the region. According to Devon Energy's latest press release, they drilled 38 oil wells in the basin since January 2012, and have already identified 600 potential locations within its lease areas where a well could be drilled.

That's just Wyoming's upcoming energy boom. Colorado is only a stone's throw from the University of Wyoming campus. Colorado's Niobrara play, which is the one you keep hearing about in the news, actually runs underneath Cheyenne, Wyo., and Laramie, Wyo. If those two shale plays weren't enough, there are five more basins with potential within a couple hours so of the University of Wyoming. And in Wyoming, they don't have to worry about East versus West envy, waiting on infrastructure to be built or attempting to support two major universities like North Dakota does.

Coach Bohl has never hidden the fact that he approaches coaching college football like the CEO of an organization. Bohl is not afraid to admit that a coach is responsible for a great deal of time off the field and that the time a coach spends

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actually coaching is diminishing every year. He actually means it when he compliments his coaching staff, because he is busy with fundraising duties, driving ticket sales, cultivating scholarships and other incidentals unrelated to traditional coaching duties. This trend continues to increase and coaches everywhere must continue to time manage and make difficult political decisions at every turn.

Coach Bohl said he did everything he can do for the Bison program. I would go a couple steps further and say he did all he could for the school and state, too. His recruiting savvy and visionary leadership opened up opportunities for North Dakota the likes of which we had never seen before. After winning back-to-back championships and returning undefeated for a third, what speaks volumes is how NDSU is still receiving very little national TV love. Teams like Delaware State and New Hampshire are routinely considered bigger national television draws than NDSU.

North Dakota is still the Sports Illustrated football phone to the rest of the nation. Oh, sure! You betcha! A novelty or gimmick, don'tcha know. NDSU has produced one of the best programs in the nation for the past five years but getting any national coverage for the playoffs or a regular season game is like pulling teeth. I swear that last year they put the FCS semi-finals on ESPN Ocho.

Wyoming will routinely have the opportunity to be featured on national broadcasts, whereas NDSU is still trying to get the local NBC affiliate and Fox Sports North logistics ironed out every year. And that is by no means a shot at NDSU. That is the reality of FBS and FCS football.

Visibility challenges notwithstanding, Bohl simply outgrew North Dakota. Former NDSU play-by-play announcer, erstwhile professional quarterback and current MSNBC talk show host, Ed Schultz, called it the day Craig Bohl was hired by NDSU.

"You've got a million-dollar-man hired as your football coach, North Dakota. I hope you all can see that," Schultz proselytized.

Even back then, he knew coach Bohl not only understood the game and politics of NCAA football, but he knew Bohl had that charismatic X Factor words cannot describe.

The coaching carousel is an unfortunate sign of the times. Social media has

just added to that fire. Please do not even entertain the idea of blaming Bohl for making this decision. The decision is his and his family's to make. The timing is a short window produced by today's instant oatmeal environment.

Those who know Coach Bohl, know this was a difficult time for him and his family. I would imagine if anyone out there reading this were to put on Coach Bohl's cleats, they would have jumped at the Wyoming opportunity. Seriously, the Wyoming job is like winning the instant lottery with a couple more numbers still at-large in a bigger jackpot lottery. If you realize Bohl's professional acumen, and know what the state of Wyoming is planning over the next five years, NDSU could never, I mean NEVER, come close to matching this overall deal.

Let's look at the Bohl numbers. Recently fired Cowboys coach Dave Christensen had a total package of \$1.2 million per season and reports indicate Bohl's total package will total top out at \$1.3 million with a base salary of \$750,000. His base salary at NDSU was \$206,000.

It will be fun to watch what coach Bohl can accomplish in Laramie, a town of 30,000. Bohl is more than a coach, he is a program builder. He has a knack for finding diamonds in the rough who have the drive to win. He builds programs around them. And when you add is wife, Leia, you know they can build communities.

The work Coach Bohl did with the community, the University and team speaks for itself. Only time will tell whether his smash mouth style of traditional hard-nosed football will work at the FBS level. Especially in a conference that spreads out teams to play in untraditional ways. In the end, North Dakota had better take notice of the new business climate, because today it is a football coach, tomorrow it could be oil and gas companies entertaining unmatched offers from other states.



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