

Boise State dumps wrestling program; Bozeman's Keavon Buckley on roster

By Richie Melby -
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BOISE, Idaho — Coaches, athletes and fans of the Boise State wrestling program were in shock this week when the university announced it was cutting the sport in favor of baseball.

“This was not an easy decision, but one that needed to be made as we consider the long-term vision for Bronco athletics,” Boise State athletic director Curt Apsey said in a media release. “We will continue to honor the scholarships we provide our student-athletes, and will do all we can to help those who want to continue their collegiate wrestling careers elsewhere. Additionally, current coaching contracts will be honored.”

Montana has a solid history of wrestlers attending Boise State. Former Great Falls High standout Scott Barrett is arguably the top wrestler in the program's history, capturing four consecutive Big Sky Conference individual titles from 1979 to 1982. He finished runner-up in the NCAA championships in 1982.

Bozeman's Keavon Buckley is a redshirt sophomore on the Broncos and was shocked by the news.

“It really came out of left field. It's kind of just settling in,” said Buckley. “I don't know. It's a little weird right now and just settling in.”

Buckley and his teammates are free to remain at the university on scholarship, but many are currently seeking options elsewhere to continue their wrestling careers.

“Right now, I need to talk with my parents and see where they're at,” he said. “I would like to continue wrestling, but I'll need to see where life takes me.”

Buckley's former Bozeman teammate, Bjorn Schroeder, recently signed his national Letter of Intent to compete on the BSU wrestling team. Schroeder's mother tells MTN Sports the family is currently weighing his best option as well.

“I would love (to team up with Schroeder again),” said Buckley. “I'm real close with Bjorn, me and him won almost every tournament together his freshman year and my senior year. We became close-knit and our families have been close, so I'm definitely going to give him a call here and see what he wants to do. Hopefully we can get Bozeman back together.”

Helena's Toby Erickson spent two seasons at Boise State before pursuing the Greco-Roman world for the United States. Despite his shorter-than-normal stay with the Broncos, he says he still "bleeds blue," a BSU slogan, and cutting the program in favor of baseball is disappointing.

"To me, what it comes down to, I don't want to bash the administration, but they want to compete in the Mountain West. Wrestling at Boise State was not a Mountain West sport, we were a Pac-12 sport. So we weren't aligned with the Mountain West," said Erickson, who is currently training for the U.S. national team in Colorado Springs. "I saw an article that the President of Boise State wanted a baseball team, not a club anymore, he wanted a team. To cut wrestling out to get that team, I think it's a low blow."

Erickson knows his former program has been in a slump in recent years — the Broncos last conference title came in 2011 — but also believes first-year coach Mike Mendoza and the staff could have returned the team to its glory days.

"It has been one of the more dominant sports at Boise State," Erickson said of the wrestling team. "The only reason why the wrestling team wasn't in front of the news articles and everything was because we were overshadowed by a brilliant football team there. When the football team was doing amazing, so was the wrestling team. I want to say since 2000 we have six Pac-12 titles, including back-to-back. We have two or three top 10 finishes and it was the premier school for wrestling in the northwest. You had us and Oregon State. Now, dropping that, you only have Oregon State wrestling and I don't think the wrestling world needs this right now."

"When they said it's very unlikely for them to bring (the wrestling program) back, as a former Boise State wrestler, that's a punch to the gut because of the history, because of what we've done as a program there," Erickson continued. "It doesn't resonate well with a lot of people. All of my buddies that I wrestled with at Boise State and all the alumni that I'm friends with on Facebook, they have shown their absolute disapproval of this move."

"It's a real shock around Boise," added Buckley. "It's a strongly knit wrestling community down here in Boise, so it's definitely complete shock for everyone. They brought in our two new coaches and kind of left them out to dry, so it's complete shock over here."

Wrestling continues to gain popularity in Montana. The high school wrestling state tournament annually draws near-capacity crowds at Rimrock Auto Arena in Billings, and youth programs and tournaments continue to pop up across the Treasure State.

Erickson believes that support of the sport can be seen across the country.

"There is no better time to be a wrestler in America, because we are at a peak of being popular," he said. "You see NAIA schools, Division II schools, small Division I schools across the U.S. popping up college wrestling programs. Not only for men, women are getting teams too. It's all because wrestling is becoming so popular and for Boise State to cut it, it doesn't seem right."

UPDATE: Wednesday evening, Flo Wrestling reported that Boise State has currently put the decision to drop the wrestling program on hold, according to its sources at a meeting between administrators and the student council. The report also states that BSU President Bob Kustra is expected to release a statement by Monday.

To view the complete Flo Wrestling report, click [here](#).