

Oregon assistant Jim Bartko is Fresno State's new athletic director

By Robert Kuwada and Bryant-Jon Anteola

Jim Bartko is introduced as Fresno State's athletic director at a news conference Nov. 21 at Save Mart Center.

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Fresno State has hired Jim Bartko, the executive senior associate athletic director for development at the University of Oregon, to be its next athletics director and execute an ambitious vision for the Bulldogs' sports programs set forth by university President Joseph Castro.



Bartko, who has been a dynamic fundraiser at Oregon and has close ties to Nike chief Phil Knight, is set to be introduced as Fresno State's AD at a Friday morning media event at the Save Mart Center.



Bartko helped generate more than \$150 million for capital improvements and facilities enhancements during an initial 17-year run at Oregon. After a brief stop at the University of California in 2006, he returned to Oregon and led a campaign to build the Matthew Knight Arena, a state-of-the-art venue which includes the largest and highest resolution video boards in an NCAA arena.

"The goal was to get a guy who could elevate the program and energize and embrace the community, because it's not just dealing with people who went to Fresno State," said a member of the 15-person search committee, who asked not to be identified because the choice of Bartko hadn't been officially announced. "You need all the people in Fresno and the surrounding communities. I think we've found that guy. I think he'll relate well to the community. He's a good fit for Fresno State. And with the right leadership and vision, Fresno State could elevate its brand nationally and make a good pitch to get into the Power Five."

Bartko was tabbed from a deep pool of ADs and administrators with development and fund-raising backgrounds that was assembled with the aid of the Chicago-based search firm DHR International. He replaces Thomas Boeh, who in August was reassigned by Castro to an advisory position within the university administration with three years remaining on his contract.

The charge for Bartko is simple, though getting there will present a number of challenges.

Fresno State has won the past two Mountain West Conference championships in football and will be playing for a third on Saturday at Nevada, as well as titles in women's tennis and women's basketball and had individual champions in track and field and women's swimming and diving. And Castro has said he wants to elevate the Bulldogs' athletic programs and to be well-positioned in the event there is further expansion among the Power Five conferences that dominate the top tier of NCAA athletics.

Fresno State has upgraded facilities and infrastructure the past two years, renovating the weight room and football locker room, opening a soccer and lacrosse stadium and adding a training table.

But those steps have not been enough for Fresno State, which for years has lagged behind its conference rivals, to keep pace in the rapidly changing landscape of Division I athletics.

Fresno State was one of the last schools in the Mountain West to implement a training table for its football program — the other is the Air Force Academy, where all cadets take meals at the Cadet Dining Hall. And with changes in NCAA legislation allowing for unlimited meals, schools including some in the conference have expanded training table programs.

Boise State replaced its football training table with a supplemental meal program that allows its players to eat more regular meals with no deduction from their scholarship stipends.

At Fresno State, the training table is open to all student-athletes who wish to participate in the program and the student-athletes pay the institutional cost of the meals.

The athletic department also is under pressure with more schools committing to provide student-athletes with a cost-of-attendance stipend, which could add up to \$500,000 to \$1 million per year.

Boise State as well as all schools in the Mid-American Conference last month committed to providing a cost-of-attendance stipend, and Castro reaffirmed his commitment to the Bulldogs' student-athletes.

"Fresno State is committed to ensuring that all of our student-athletes have an opportunity to thrive," Castro said then in a statement through a university spokesman. He added that the school will chart a course by January and that any changes would begin next fall.

The athletic department also ranks eighth among the 12 schools that field football teams in the Mountain West Conference in revenues, at about \$33.7 million.

A prominent Fresno State booster who asked not to be identified said that statistic speaks volumes about why Bartko is the university's choice. Castro, the booster said, "wanted somebody like that with a track record at fundraising. I think everybody wanted someone like that. He comes highly recommended."

Bartko could not be reached Thursday to comment.

His work at Oregon includes helping raise funds for a \$91 million expansion of Autzen Stadium. He was senior associate AD at Cal before returning to Oregon in mid-2007.

Bartko earned his bachelor's degree in sports administration with a minor in business administration from Washington State in 1987, according to a brief biography from his days at Cal. He later worked as an intern and assistant director of marketing at Washington State from 1987-89.

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