

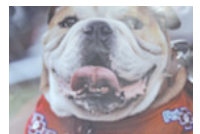
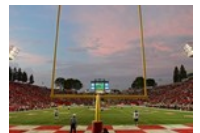
Fresno State's new AD Jim Bartko puts long-term success ahead of speed

By Robert Kuwada



Fresno State Athletic Director Jim Bartko is on the job, settling into his new surroundings after being hired away from Oregon. CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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- By the numbers

MOUNTAIN WEST ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT REVENUES

- **UNLV:** \$64,513,044
- **New Mexico:** \$44,345,840
- **Boise State:** \$43,166,257
- **San Diego State:** \$39,211,827
- **Air Force:** \$39,031,348
- **Hawaii:** \$37,017,100
- **Colorado State:** \$34,791,926
- **Fresno State:** \$33,734,773
- **Wyoming:** \$29,647,103
- **Nevada:** \$26,667,415
- **San Jose State:** \$25,834,038
- **Utah State:** \$23,684,766

MOUNTAIN WEST REVENUES FROM CONTRIBUTIONS

- **Boise State:** \$11,142,524
- **New Mexico:** \$9,060,270
- **UNLV:** \$7,752,604
- **San Diego State:** \$5,643,426
- **Colorado State:** \$4,935,167
- **Fresno State:** \$4,823,268
- **Nevada:** \$4,671,530
- **Hawaii:** \$4,646,918
- **San Jose State:** \$3,467,071
- **Utah State:** \$2,962,548
- **Wyoming:** \$2,896,599
- **Air Force:** \$1,137,161

Source: USA Today, 2013

Fresno State athletic director Jim Bartko is making good use of a GPS device in finding his way around town, from the hotel that he is calling home for the next six months to his office in the on-campus North Gym to everywhere else he

has needed to be in his first two weeks on the job.

Navigating what is ahead for the athletic department is much trickier, with full cost of attendance measures approved this weekend by the NCAA's Big 5 conferences and a long list of facilities and program improvements that are needed for the Bulldogs to remain competitive within the Mountain West.

Bulldog Stadium is in need of renovation.

The return of wrestling has been promised.

An athletic training table is off to a strong start but must be funded into the future.

There are staffing, budget and other facilities issues.

Bartko, who was hired Nov. 20 and charged with driving the Bulldogs' athletic programs forward into the rapidly changing and more costly college sports landscape, has embraced the challenges.

"It has been a great first week and a half," he said. "The fans, they're very passionate and they've been great, welcoming me. I sent a letter out to all of them, thanking them for their past involvement, asking for suggestions on restaurants, being that I'm going to be living in a hotel and don't know where to go, and just ideas, 'If they were in my shoes what would they do?'"

"There has been a lot of input on parking to ticket pricing to community engagement. All very welcoming, 'Glad you're here and if I can help or be of assistance' That's what it's all about. It's a good family fan base here. We just have to get out and make sure they know that we're here."

Within 30 days, he expects to have a five-year plan in place, and then go from there. In a sit-down session with The Bee, Bartko discussed what is directly ahead.

The Bee: Just walking in the door, to use a football analogy, it's first down, but this place going way back has been penalized for personal fouls and illegal procedures and delays of game. It's almost like you're backed up to your own 25-yard line. Where do you start, or what has to get done — now?

Bartko: Great question. I don't look at it as first-and-40. I think every program in the country has had ups and downs. We have a passionate coaching staff. They've been great. I've met with all of them. Helpful. They all want to be team players. But we have some things that we have to work on. We have some facilities that we have to improve, that are current. We've got to look at Bulldog Stadium long term. We have to look at the sports expansion issue, the costs and how we fit that all in. There are NCAA issues with cost of attendance and training table. I think we just need to sit back for the next couple of weeks and look at all of those things together and put together a good five-year plan that we can afford and manage and be successful with in those plans. You can't change everything in one day.

I'm not going to rush into judgments on anything too quickly because I think it has to have a solid base behind it. The president and his cabinet have been very welcoming and great to work with. I think it's a collaboration on all fronts, and we want to be successful in everything that we do.

The stipends, training table, those have to be high on that priority list. They're here — other departments in the conference already are ahead ...

They're demanding. Obviously, we need to take care of the current sports that we have, make sure they have every resource we have. Our student-athletes are what make it possible, and those new initiatives are going to be mandated, and we have to do it the right way and be consistent with our conference. We're not going to do the same as what Alabama does, but we're going to be competitive with Boise and all of the other schools. My biggest thing is we make sure we get out in the community and let people know what our vision is and what our plan is.

Those are the first three things that I think we have to get done. The budget, long-term planning ... Bulldog Stadium needs some work, and we're going to look at getting some consultants out here to look at that long term. But, again, we have to make sure everything we have currently is up to speed and done effectively. We have some open spots we have to fill that haven't been filled for a while, make sure our staff is up and running, make sure our fund-raising and marketing staff, ticketing, are customer-service oriented. But they're fun challenges. The best thing so far is every time I've met with the staff or a booster group or the foundation board, they're all welcome to a change, excited to kind of see what is going to happen and how can they help. That's all I can ask because I need the help right now.

I haven't gone to the grocery store yet, haven't found a dry cleaner yet, haven't been to the bank yet. Just going all day ... the toughest thing so far, being away from the family. It's three days and you think, 'I've talked to my daughter once.' You just don't have the time — you go to basketball games, the women's game, the men's game. It's fun stuff, but time does fly.

And you're giving yourself 30 days for all that?

I think we've all talked, I need to digest where the budget was, where the budget is going, what the new NCAA rules are, what our facility needs are internally here — we're all kind of moving around. I have about 10 days to decide who goes in what offices. It's not as simple as just saying, 'You go there and you go there.' It's about what makes us most efficient. Then people will be displaced for nine more months until the new offices are done, the North Gym is done.

Obviously, the sports expansion is a big topic and it's something I have to get my arms around and look at the best timeline and structure of that and see what the best financing is for that. I have to look at Bulldog Stadium long term. There are five or six things that you have to have a solid plan in place and not rush because we want everything to succeed and we have to do it the right way.

The sports expansion deal. You have some experience with that at Oregon, bringing back a baseball program, adding a couple of other sports. That's not something where you say, 'We're going to do this' and the next year you're out on the field with a team. What was the process at Oregon?

We fundraised first, went to the donor base because we knew we couldn't afford up front to fund it all. We needed the support of the alums and the people who wanted it back. We spent about six to nine months raising money. We had to build a facility, build a ballpark, privately funded. We had to get the budget up. We had to find a coach, and he needed about two years to recruit because you don't want to come in and have all seniors. You want to build it slowly, and we were fortunate to get a really good coach, George Horton, who had success ... it didn't take very long. But it was a three-year process.

At Oregon, we added soccer and lacrosse, acrobatics and tumbling and sand volleyball in my time there, and baseball. It was all about a two- or three-year process for each one, just to kind of do it the right way, get a conference alignment, figure out your budget, raise the money, build the facilities, get a coach. ... You need to be thoughtful in how you do it because you want to have success. It's not a 100-yard dash, it's a marathon. It's a long-term decision.

There are pitfalls I'm sure in taking too big a step anywhere in there ...

You want to have success and you want to do it the right way. I think all of the decisions that we're going to make are going to be based upon a whole departmental plan. We have to sit down and go through that and be thoughtful when we do and do it the right way.

Everything is going to come back to fundraising and generating revenue for all of that. I get the feeling here that people are starved to see a winning product on the field, but they might not understand how far behind some of the revenue programs are. So, again, how do you even start?

It does come down to fans; fans, tickets sales and fundraising. Obviously, TV helps and going to bowl games helps. Boise State in the Fiesta Bowl, even though it hurt that we lost the (Mountain West Championship) game, financially it

helped the conference. There are a lot of alums here, a lot of donors. Our budget is not too far out of whack from other Mountain West teams. Our average attendance is right at the top. We just have to make sure we don't lose our fans. We have to make sure we fill up Bulldog Stadium. Football revenue drives a lot of the programs, so if we have success there, then we'll have success for everybody. And our fans need to know that their investment is going to go to a place that is going to do it the right way, has a good vision and cares about them as individuals and as families.

I look at it honestly that every donor from a \$100 donor to a \$1 million donor needs to be treated with respect because it's dispensable income. I mean, they don't have to come to the games if they don't want to. They can watch them on TV. We need them here. We need to sell the atmosphere. We need to sell family. We need our coaches working together, all around the Valley. We have a good base, and we have people that want to help, and I think they just need to know that and feel what their value is and that their money is going to be invested wisely.

We're not that far off. You can look at it as a daunting project when you look at everything we have to do, the wish list. ... But you take it a piece at a time. You can't do too much too quickly, invest in things that can show a result and engage the community. You can look at the Save Mart Center and say, 'We need more fans there.' But we have to go out and ask them. We have to go out and find them. We have to go out and tell them that we need them there, and that's probably something that we need to get better at.

Do you feel getting the community to reengage is the top priority?

I want to be careful that I don't say 'reengage' because there are a lot of donors that are engaged and helping. We need to make sure that those that we've lost or that kind of feel that they aren't that important anymore know that they are important.

I had a person call me after I got the job and he said Fresno State is ripe to have success. You need to make sure you engage the families of those that were so engaged but are now older. Get their families that maybe have felt that they're not. So, he says, if we get out and show them that you care, they're there and they'll be there. That's what made this job attractive. It's a college town. It's a community. You're the only show in town. People do care. But modern TV times and late-night games and Tuesday night games, that makes it harder for fans. You have to make sure they have a reason to come.

Do you see the way Fresno State has fundraised over the past seven or eight years changing? There was a point where it became more professional or maybe more corporate ...

That's an interesting topic. I spent four hours (Thursday) with those groups. Great people. Hard working. Loyal. Unfortunately, the pressure in the fundraising is on them. When there's more money that needs to be raised, the fundraisers and the marketing staff and the ticket sales, it comes down to needing more money. We always have to improve. But they're great people with great ideas, great history. Fundraising has become more technology and online, but you just can't take the personal touch out of it and that's where I think we're going to improve.

We're going to get out. We're going to improve on engaging the people in the community. Face-to-face is always much better than an email or a text. You have to have a combination of both, but everywhere I've gone and all of those replies I've got from my email it's 'we welcome you back into the community, we want to be involved' and that's what I think we need to work on.

You get the sense in talking to donors and boosters that has slipped a bit?

I just think there has been a lot of change, a lot of turnover, for whatever reason. But I spend a lot of my time during the games trying to walk the stands, just shaking hands and meeting people and I think that's what we all need to do. Fundraising is not just fundraisers. Fundraising is all 100-something of our staff members, from answering phone calls to media relations to interns to coaches to assistant coaches, they're all our best ambassadors. The student-athletes, getting them out and about, having them call and thank people for their giving, all critical things we need to do.

We have to look at every touch point we do and be collaborative with the campus. I used this a lot at Oregon and I think it's true here — athletics is not the most important part of the university, but it's a great window and if we can be collaborative with the campus and the President's Office and other units on campus and bring people into town to help everybody be better we're all going to succeed.

I think the fundraising staff on campus, the advancement team on campus, our fundraisers need to work with them to talk about what we're doing so we're on the same page and have the same messaging. All critical. It can be forgotten and it can get so busy, but there are small things that you can do to make everybody succeed.

What do you think that five-year plan is going to look like in a couple of weeks?

I want every coach and every student-athlete to feel that they're getting everything they need to be successful. That's first and foremost, whether we have 18 sports, 20 sports or 30 sports, those student-athletes and coaches have the resources to have success. Athletics also needs to make sure that we're taking care of our business, raising the money and not being a drain on the university. We need to look at long-term football and that stadium. It needs to get upgraded with the ADA, the press box and seating. We have facilities on campus that aren't up to par. There need to be tweaks here and there. And we need to look at our long-term planning for staffing and programs.

In five years, if we can sit back and say, we've raised \$5 million more a year, we've got an upgrade to Bulldog Stadium, we've got 20 great sports that are successful and we have stability in all of our programs, our donor base has grown from 3,000 donors to 6,000 donors and people feel good, I'll have a glass of wine and sit back a little bit. It's going to be a busy five years. It's going to be a busy 10 years. We need to put together a solid plan that we can achieve success is what I really want to have.

Is it your understanding in putting that plan together that the Title IX investigation is behind you?

I think it's close. I don't think it's done, but it should be pretty close. We need to get that finished first. I have a lot of information on it. I think they've made a lot of steps, there has been a lot of commitment on the campus' part, and I think we're just about over that and that's good. It needs to be over. It needs to be behind us. The programs all need to be feeling good about themselves right now, and we need to show commitment to everybody to keep it going.

Is it possible to do what needs to be done in Bulldog Stadium without securing a sponsorship or naming rights?

I don't know. We're going to look at some consultants come in and look at the stadium and just kind of give us some ideas and options. Until they really sit down and tell me what the costs are and the financing of it, that's a question I probably can't answer. But we will have some people come in that I know that will give me an idea of what can be done and what the cost is. We don't need more seats. We need some club areas. We need some more sky boxes and some accessibility and look at some parking options, a footprint to go forward, maybe take some baby steps and look at scoreboard improvements.

But every sport needs a few things. I want to make sure it's not just football. But there are some needs that coach has been very patient about, and we have to wrap those things up, too.

The stadium should look familiar — it's the same as Autzen Stadium 20 years ago.

It's the same bowl, yeah. I'm just more curious as to, long term, what they have in there because I've been through it and ... accessibility for fans to get up and down the stairs and just bathrooms and concessions points, some small things.

Until we really dive into it, we're not going to have an idea what can be done, what can't be done, what can be done short term and long term, what can be done if we can raise enough money, what cannot be done if we raise a little bit of money.

But we have some other programs that also need to be addressed ... tennis courts and the track for our athletes ... those things have not been taken care of and if we're going to do something, we're going to do it right.

That track surface, there are high schools with better facilities ...

I took a walk out there with coach. Again, they're great. I just tell them to be patient with me, give me a little time to wrap my arms around everything. There are budgets that we have to achieve and increased costs of not having a Nebraska at home or a USC game on the road, the payouts this year are going to be different, the costs of scholarships are going to go up a million bucks, probably more, a year. Training table is going to go up. We have to look at everything and stay within our means and things we have to raise money for take time.

That's an interesting part of the equation. At a school like Fresno State, you're not getting an \$18 million check from TV dropped in the bank account, so what is the right balance between feeding football and everything else in driving fundraising and that ticket revenue?

You look at Boise. They do it. Nevada has got a new addition. Schools can do it. It has to be all of our programs working together to have success. Football obviously drives revenue, but every sport is important. We have great student-athletes that need the opportunity and my goal in this part of it and I know with our discussion campus is we're going to be a broad-based program and give a lot of kids the opportunity to go to school and do it the right way and have success top to bottom.

I did come here because I saw the potential to have success, and I'm not going to be satisfied just kind of being average. I think that's what our fans want, coaches want and our president wants, and we'll be great ambassadors for this whole university and this community.

You look at Oregon and football is in the top 1% in the country, but so is everything else. Here, you kind of need to feed that beast to allow everything else to grow or catch up ...

I bet you Oregon, 70% of the revenue is from football and their budget. But every other program knows that the more success football has, the better their budget is going to be and we're going to take care of every student-athlete the same, we're going to take care of every program and we're going to strive to be the best in everything.

I think having the belief that you can win and having a belief that you can sell it to a recruit that if you come to Fresno State, we're going to battle and we're going to overachieve in some areas, we're going to be efficient and get a little lucky here or there with some things. You look at it top to bottom and basketball is coming on, women's basketball is doing great, tennis is going to have a great season, baseball obviously has had great success, softball has won a World Series. We've proven that we can do it. Now it's just a belief that we're going to do it consistently.

Is it possible to do all of that at the same time or do you have to do one before you can do the other, kind of a chicken and egg thing?

I don't think you really have the option. Before we do anything, we need to make sure we're raising money, selling tickets, getting football filled up, but we also need to make sure all of our 17 programs are being taken care of the right way. So, yes, I think you need to do it all, and our budget will dictate that. That's why we have to reach out to all of our fans around and have to raise fundraising a little bit and raise ticket sales a little bit, become maybe more efficient in what we do here in the department top to bottom. Everybody is going to have to do a little bit more than probably they think they should do, but people have been great. They want to do more. They're dedicated and they're loyal and they're passionate. I don't want Fresno State to be a stepping-stone. That's my biggest thing. I want a staff here that wants to be here for the haul to get this thing done and I've heard that they are.

The football dynamic, in the past there just have been things they just haven't done. A multiyear contract for a coordinator or assistant coach. Other CSU schools have done that in the past. Fresno State won't. Until a few years ago there was no summer bridge program ... training table ...

I'm getting a lot of that feedback, but they've won the conference or the division three straight times, were one game away from a potential BCS (bowl) two years ago. It shows with Boise State going to the Fiesta Bowl it's much easier for a team in the Mountain West to go to a BCS game than it is for some Pac-12 schools. You have to be in the top 20 compared to being in the top 8 and if we knock on the door and schools have proven they can do it ... our fans deserve it, too.

Do you have any idea, any thoughts on what that landscape might look like in the future?

I don't know. ... I want a house, I want my family here. I want to have a little sanity in my life and get through these first 30 days. But you do lay in bed at night ...there's a list of things to do, but there is at every school. There are a lot of schools that are very much where we are, trying to figure out the new landscape of college athletics and how does everything play in — what can they afford, the lawsuits, what does that mean? What is it going to look like in three years? We just have to stay the course. Stay patient. Do things the right way. Get efficient. Raise some more money. Have some success. And not bite too much off too quickly. We can do it all, but you have to have a plan and go step by step by step, and that plan will be in time. It's going to take a few days to figure that one out.

I'm surprised you're giving yourself only 30 days ...

I think 30 days will give us an idea what the priorities can be and what the costs will be and what we need to do, step by step. I think the department is waiting for it. The donors are waiting for it. There's been a lot of work already. There was a lot of work leading up to me getting here putting that together, too, and now it's going to take a little tweaking and teamwork, a little patience on all parts, and we'll get it done.

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