

# Iverson Flying High In Fort Collins

## Former Buck Shining In Senior Season At CSU

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of three stories from Press & Dakotan sports editor James D. Cimburek's trip to Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo.*

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — Colorado State men's basketball coach Larry Eustachy calls senior post Colton Iverson a "very likeable guy."

And it has nothing to do with the fact that the Yankton native leads his team in scoring (14.4 ppg) and ranks second in rebounding (9.1 rpg). Though it doesn't hurt.

Iverson, in his first and final season with the Rams, has helped CSU to a 15-3 record this season, including a win over then-23rd ranked UNLV this past Saturday. The transfer from the University of Minnesota has endeared himself to the Rams' first-year head coach because of his hard work on the court and his personality off it.

"Colton's a very likeable guy. He has a really witty personality," Eustachy said in an exclusive interview after Saturday's win. "He really likes to play. Most guys his size play basketball because they're that big. I think he would play if he were 5-10."

Iverson transferred to Colorado State after three seasons at Minnesota where, despite starting 26 games as a freshman, he never became a key part of the team's rotation. In three seasons, he averaged just 5.3 points and 4.3 rebounds per game.

Upon arriving in Fort Collins, Iverson spent the 2011-12 season — in which he couldn't compete due to NCAA transfer rules — working to prepare for his final season of college basketball.

"I tried to get a workout in most days outside of practice," he said. "I wanted to improve my game, become more agile, get stronger."

"I feel it has definitely paid off."

One of the areas that needed work as Iverson entered his senior season was free throw shooting. As a Gopher, he shot just 53.9 percent from the line. This year his percentage is up to 66.7, including a 5-for-6 effort in CSU's victory over UNLV.

"Before I had a lot of extra movement. I focused on setting the ball and how I follow through, taking away all that extra movement," Iverson said. "Now I feel confident at the free throw line, and it shows up in games."

The willingness to completely revamp his free throw shooting at this stage in his career is something Eustachy said is another example of why Iverson is a special player.

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JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

**ABOVE:** Colton Iverson, 45, celebrates in front of the Colorado State University student section after the Rams' 66-61 victory over No. 23 UNLV. Iverson, a senior from Yankton, leads CSU in scoring and ranks second on the team in rebounding. He ranks in the top-50 in NCAA Division I in both rebounding and field goal percentage.

**BELOW:** Iverson slams the ball home during the Rams' victory over UNLV. The dunk was Iverson's only field goal in the game, but the senior went 5-for-6 from the line to finish with seven points and a team-high 10 rebounds.



## Eustachy, Colorado State Making Their Mark

BY ARNIE STAPLETON  
AP Sports Writer

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — No visitor has walked out of Moby Arena a winner since Colorado State coach Larry Eustachy led Southern Miss to a victory at the Rams' ear-splitting, high-altitude auditorium back in November 2011.

The Rams went on to make an NCAA tournament run, after which coach Tim Miles left for Nebraska.

In stepped Eustachy, a seasoned coach who's taken three schools to the NCAA tournament and is in line for a fourth with the Rams on such a roll.

Colorado State's 66-61 win over UNLV on Saturday extended its school-record winning streak to 24 straight wins at home.

"We know how important it is to win at home," said guard Dorian Green, who was named the MWC player of the week on Monday. "Especially in our conference. If we want good things to happen this year, we have to win at home."

The Runnin' Rebels were the fourth ranked team to succumb to the "Moby Magic" during the streak.

Now comes the hard part for

these Rollin' Rams (15-3, 2-1 Mountain West) — taking that show on the road.

They visit No. 15 New Mexico (16-2, 3-0) on Wednesday night.

"It's going to be a monumental task," Eustachy said Monday. "I've been in there before and I'm quite familiar with Steve (Alford) being at Iowa State when he was at Iowa. He just does a terrific job."

The feeling is mutual.

Alford ranks the Rams "right near the top" of the Lobos' list of top-notch opponents so far, noting "this is without question the best rebounding team we're going to be matched up against. So, their toughness, their experience, those are all great concerns."

The Rams start five seniors: center Colton Iverson, a 6-foot-10 transfer from Minnesota; and returners Pierce Horning at forward; and Green, Wes Eikmeier and Greg Smith at guard.

"Any time you start five seniors, that's extremely dangerous," Alford said.

That seasoning showed up at the foul line Saturday night when the Rams made all 10 of their free throws in the final 3 1/2 minutes to streak.

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# Roller Coaster Ride Lands Pena-Benjamin At MMC

BY NICK ROBINSON  
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Jose Pena-Benjamin has been on a roller-coaster ride the last few years.

Going from school to school, the junior on the Mount Marty College men's basketball team may have finally stepped off the ride and settled into his new home.

Pena-Benjamin — who is averaging 9.4 points and 3.3 rebounds for the Lancers this season — attended Rahway High School in Rahway, N.J., located between New York City and the Jersey shore.

"I came from a really big school in New Jersey," Pena-Benjamin said. "I graduated (in 2009) with about 2,000 students in my class."

Pena-Benjamin enjoyed his four years of playing variety basketball for Rahway High. His teammate and now mentor, Earl Clark, forward for the Los Angeles Lakers and former Louisville Cardinal guided Pena-Benjamin through the years.

"Those days were awesome (playing with Earl Clark)," Pena-Benjamin said. "We talk a lot about basketball and he helps me out with college and shows me what it really takes to make it to the NBA."

Pena-Benjamin also said he and Clark speak on a regular basis.

Not only did he excel in basketball, Pena-Benjamin also ran track and played on the football team.

"I started out playing football later than everyone else but my junior year Villanova had talked to me about potentially going to play football there."

### Staying The Course

With a tough decision ahead of him, he decided to stick with his true love: basketball.

As his senior year was winding down, Pena-Benjamin was looking for a place to play basketball and had teams from all around the East Coast itching for him to play at their university.

"A couple of A-10 schools were interested in me like Iona, St. Peter's, St. Joseph's, Temple,

Rider, Buffalo and Georgia Southern," he said. "But I just didn't have the grades to go to any of them."

After pondering his next move, Pena-Benjamin committed to Colby Community College in Colby, Kan.

After finishing school and spending two seasons at the juco, Pena-Benjamin broke his ankle.

"It was a two year school; I got my degree from there," he said. "But, I broke my ankle during my sophomore year and the new coach asked me to come back. I wanted to play ball and I didn't want to sit out."

With no schools looking at him and a recovering ankle, Pena-Benjamin decided to take his talents to division two Nyack College in New York.

"Nyack is like the D2 version of BYU," he said. "It was very strict and its inner city. I ended up with a 2.3 GPA and just wasn't cutting it."

"I was out of control, partying, you name it, I wasn't focused on school or anything else I was just happy to be on the court."

Mount Marty College assistant coach Ted Quinn was Pena-Benjamin's head coach at Nyack College. After a rough season, Nyack let Quinn go.

"We recruited him and right from the start we knew he was a player who had a lot of energy and passion, and he brought it with him," Quinn said. "He always gave us something exciting."

After a late summer phone call with Quinn, Pena-Benjamin was again questioning himself and what his next move would be.

"I spoke to Quinn while I was working over the summer and I said wherever he went I wanted to follow," Pena-Benjamin said. "He said he was going back home to South Dakota and said I wouldn't like South Dakota. But, Kansas is just like South Dakota. I couldn't go back to D2, so basically Mount Marty College was my last option."

After conversing back and forth plans were made for Pena-Benjamin to meet the Lancers head coach Jim Thorson right as classes were beginning to start.

"We didn't have it planned for him to come here," Quinn said. "He contacted me and he knew I was doing some changes. I knew Thorson would be interested and we got the two introduced and it went from there."

Pena-Benjamin made the move from N.J. to S.D. and when asked about the difference between the bright lights of the east coast and S.D. he said, "I like it here. So far it's a good experience. It's like you study and you can go catch a movie or hang out with friends. A total change from big city life in Jersey. In Jersey there are a lot of distractions with all the big city lights."

After a month of school at Mount Marty College, Pena-Benjamin suffered a major setback: the death of his younger brother.

### Overcoming Obstacles

Robert Roman, passed away on Oct. 4. He was a member of the Post University cross country and track teams.

"It was so shocking," Pena-Benjamin said. "I've had a chip on my shoulder ever since. I couldn't make the funeral and I missed a big part of my life. I didn't have the chance to say goodbye."

Having his heart on his sleeve, Pena-Benjamin worked as hard as he could in the classroom and on the court during the first semester for the Lancers.

"I'm really excited for him, he did a good job in the fall and is off to a great start this semester," Quinn said. "I have to give the credit to the Mount Marty staff and professors, they embraced him. I can tell he enjoys it and I give credit to his willingness to take this step."

This fall, Pena-Benjamin also found a career and major he is interested in: criminal justice.

"I'd like to be a US Marshall or an FBI Agent but my goal is to play overseas," he said. "My uncle is playing right now professionally in France and he said I have the tools to go play there but I just need to keep working every day."

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P&D FILE PHOTO

Mount Marty's Jose Pena-Benjamin, right, goes in for a layup against the defense of Dakota Wesleyan's Aireus Stephenson during a home game earlier this season.