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CU turns tables on Big 12, set to run with power

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/20/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT



(Photos by Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — From the spread to smash-mouth, Colorado's offense is taking on a new look this season. Power football is back.

Most important, Buffaloes players and coaches say, is creating an identity — a mentality of toughness and tough yards. Run, baby, run. Push that pile.

Yes, but in the pass-happy Big 12?

As some are quick to point out, Air Force fares

quite well in the Mountain West by being different.

"Everybody else in the Big 12 is doing a certain style of offense," senior tight end Riar Geer said, referring to the spread. "We're kind of like the wild card this year. Defenses playing us will have to prepare for something else. That definitely plays into our hand."

Being unique is

Colorado State Football

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part of the reason for changing offenses, but only part of it, said new offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau, who handled CU's wide receivers the past three seasons.

It fits Colorado's personality and personnel, he said.

"We have some coaches who understand what it takes to pound the football," Kiesau explained. "The spread is effective for other teams, and we did a lot of different things last year. But for us, pounding the football is our nature. It's who we

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are."

Colorado has lacked depth and size along the offensive line for years, but that is no longer the case. In tackles Nate Solder (6-feet-9, 305 pounds) and Bryce Givens (6-6, 275) and guard Ryan Miller (6-8, 320), the Buffs have three pro prospects. Setting up behind them is a stable of four tailbacks whom running backs coach Darian Hagan wouldn't trade for any other group in the conference.

Don't expect Colorado to run the ball 70 times a game. But expect an obvious change in personality. Tough. Physical. Strong.

And strong-willed.

"When you have an identity and set that structure in your offense," Kiesau says, "it creates the mentality that, 'This is who we are.' When you know who you are and what you're doing, they can latch onto that and believe in it."

Rodney "Speedy" Stewart, a 5-foot-6, 175-pounder who squirts through holes before linebackers can find him, became one of the surprises of the Big 12 in 2008. He was on track for a possible 1,000-yard freshman year before suffering a season-ending leg fracture in the ninth game, at Texas A&M. Stewart still ranked seventh among Big 12 rushers with 622 yards.

Like a drag racer, Stewart can accelerate to full speed in almost a split second. However, sometimes he gets a bit out of control, the coach said.

"If Speedy can be disciplined at all times, he can improve greatly on what he did last year," Hagan said. "He's a really dynamic football player."

Darrell Scott also was a surprise as a freshman, but in another way. The preseason Big 12 newcomer of the year got banged up and knocked around last fall. He netted 343 yards, just 3.9 yards per carry — hardly what Buffs fans had expected from the 215-pound Californian who has run 100 meters in 10.5 seconds.

"Darrell is getting there," Hagan said. "He's finally getting to where he should be. In high school, he never had to make cuts or read things; he was just outrunning people. He's just now figuring out football."

Players can joke that Demetrius Sumler, as a junior, is the old man of the bunch. Sumler, 21, is not that fast or flashy. But he's a coach's dream, a dependable utility player.

"I trust him in every situation," Hagan said.

Then there's Brian Lockridge. Almost forgotten by some fans, the 5-7, 180-pound speedster may be the X-factor in the offense. Lockridge sat out the 2008 season while healing a sports hernia. In 2007 as a freshman, he became CU's breakaway threat, averaging a team-best 5.6 yards per carry.

With a motor that's always running, Lockridge was called an "Energizer Bunny" by coaches after one of his first practices.

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"He's a guy that, every time he has the ball he wants to make something big," Hagan said. "We're going to have him play all over the field."

Each of the four tailbacks brings something different. At times, two of them might be in the lineup together. That will give the defense something else to think about. All four have good hands and are threats to catch the ball out of the backfield.

And they aren't freshmen anymore.

"They know not only what direction to go, but what their footwork is, where their eyes ought to be, all the nuances," coach Dan Hawkins said. "Experience is so important."

An effective running game makes passing the ball so much easier, junior quarterback Cody Hawkins said. The play-action pass, designed to freeze linebackers and safeties who must respect the run, will be a big part of a new-look Colorado offense.

"If we come out running the ball, that will open up a lot of windows for us," Cody Hawkins said.

Having that versatility and balance will enable CU's offense to better handle anything thrown at it, tight end Ryan Deehan said.

"We have more things that we can rely on," said Deehan, a 6-5, 245-pound sophomore with a big future. "Last year (with the spread), we were basically one kind of offense that we had to get done. When that didn't work, we had nothing else

to go to."

*Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
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Top CU tailbacks

Rodney Stewart

Sophomore, 5-feet-6, 175 pounds Brookhaven HS, Columbus, Ohio

2008: 622 yards on 132 carries (4.7 average) and two TDs, seven receptions for 43 yards.

What you may not know: Despite his size, Stewart is one of the strongest players on the team, bench-pressing 400 pounds.

Darrell Scott

Sophomore, 6-1, 215 pounds St. Bonaventure HS, Ventura, Calif.

2008: 343 yards on 87 carries (3.9) and one TD, nine receptions for 105 yards.

What you may not know: Has roots in two football hotbeds. He was born in Tallahassee, Fla., and became a prep All-American in Los Angeles.

Brian Lockridge

Sophomore, 5-7, 180 pounds Mission Viejo HS, Calif.

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2007: 213 yards on 38 carries (5.6), one TD.
Medical redshirt in 2008.

What you may not know: As a child, Lockridge chose football over a potential modeling career.

Demetrius Sumler

Junior, 5-10, 215 pounds Cathedral Catholic HS, San Diego, Calif.

2008: 251 yards on 63 carries (4.0) and four TDs, 18 receptions for 167 yards.

What you may not know: An uncle, Frank White, has been the manager for former Broncos running back Terrell Davis.

About Colorado

Coach: Dan Hawkins, fourth year (13-24)

2008: 5-7 (2-6 league, tie for fourth in Big 12 North)

Returning starters: Eight on offense, five on defense

Strength: Tailbacks. With sophomores Rodney "Speedy" Stewart, Darrell Scott and 2008 redshirt Brian Lockridge joined by junior Demetrius Sumler, Colorado may have as much depth at this position as any Big 12 team. On occasion, two tailbacks may be in the lineup together.

Weakness: Wide receivers. The position was already thin, but the unexpected transfer of Josh

Smith to UCLA means newcomers must be producers. Third-year sophomore Markques Simas is still an unknown, but Buffs need him to be a go-to target after his two-game suspension.

Player with pressure: Junior QB Cody Hawkins. At the very least, Hawkins figures to rotate with sophomore Tyler Hansen. Hawkins threw for 3,015 yards as a freshman, only 1,892 last year. Coaches hope it was just a temporary, sophomore slump.

Key game: At West Virginia Oct. 1. Before a Thursday night, ESPN audience, Buffs need to make a statement before embarking on league play.

Did you know: Despite compiling losing records the past three seasons and in four of six, Colorado's 153-88-4 mark for the past 20 years ranks 20th best nationally.

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college football - briefs

Scrimmage figures to be a first-team hit

Irv Moss, *The Denver Post*

Posted: 08/20/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

Colorado players are especially "fired up" about playing in today's intrasquad scrimmage, junior quarterback Cody Hawkins said, because it could be the last time the first-team offense and the first-team defense get to hit each other in gamelike conditions.

"After that, we'll be (working on) all Colorado State, game preparation, stuff like that," he said. "The scrimmage will be good for the entire offense, the entire team."

The scrimmage, closed to spectators and the media, has been moved back to campus. Head coach Dan Hawkins, believing that his team could use a change of pace, wanted to scrimmage at Regis High School in Aurora. The scrimmage was moved back to campus for compliance reasons, according to CU.

- Players will have Sunday and Monday off — the first full days off since camp began Aug. 6.

Monday is the first day of classes. Saturday will be the last of two-a-day practices.

Tom Kensler, *The Denver Post*

Rams QB job still up for grabs.

CSU coach Steve Fairchild remains no closer to naming a starting quarterback, but several defensive linemen had a good afternoon practice in Fort Collins batting down passes at the line of scrimmage.

Freshman defensive end C.J. James, redshirt freshman end Ben Tedford and junior end/tackle Ty Whittier took turns breaking up passes.

If not at today's scrimmage, then QB candidates Grant Stucker and Jon Eastman have a chance to pull ahead Saturday. Both practices are closed to the public.

Natalie Meisler, *The Denver Post*

Falcons' search for kicker continues.

Air Force coach Troy Calhoun isn't ready to issue a call to the student body to find a place-kicker.

But he does want to solve one of his priorities soon.

With the season opener against Nicholls State 16 days away, sophomore Erik Soderberg and freshman Danny Compton have tried to nail down the kicker spot.

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Neither has gained Calhoun's nod. And to make matters worse, sophomore kicking option Garrett Jack left the team, and junior Zack Bell hasn't kicked since early in practice because of a hamstring injury.

"We have guys who have talent, but talent isn't worth squat if you can't do it on a consistent basis," Calhoun said.

As for Bell, who was on top of the depth chart coming out of spring practice, he is running out of time to compete for the job, Calhoun said.

Ryan Harrison, who led the Falcons in scoring as a kicker last year with 108 points, graduated.

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Buffs to open up playbook in scrimmage

Offense not expected to be 'vanilla' in closed scrimmage

By Ryan Thorburn
Thursday, August 20, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Folsom Field will be a no-spy zone tonight if Dan Hawkins can help it.

Colorado's head coach closed tonight's scrimmage, which begins at 5 p.m. and is scheduled to last three hours, to the public and the media.

Originally, the Buffs had planned to move the scrimmage to Regis High School in Aurora, but the CU compliance office advised Hawkins to keep his team on campus.

A week after conducting an open but somewhat boring scrimmage, the players are expecting to dig deep into the playbook tonight in the privacy of their own home field.

"When you have a bunch of people watching in the stands, you want to keep things pretty vanilla," quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "You're just getting guys used to running out and hitting. But the second scrimmage is the last chance that we have to go out and go full-on and do a game plan with situations before we start Colorado State preparations."

Neither CU or CSU has named a starting quarterback for the Sept. 6 opener at Folsom Field. Tonight's scrimmage won't prompt the coaching staff to start using pens when updating the depth chart.

"I don't think you want to come out of a scrimmage and go, 'Hey, you're out. Hey, you're in,'" Dan Hawkins said. "You have to work on the body of work."

What fans would like to see, or at least hear about, are some big plays on offense. CU ranked last in the Big 12 in scoring offense (20.2 ppg) and last in total offense (318.5 ypg) in 2008.

Despite that lack of production, Mark Helfrich was able to land the offensive coordinator position at Oregon in the spring. CU is hoping for a more explosive attack under new offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau, who was the passing game coordinator and receivers coach the past three seasons.

"I think a lot of people already have confidence in the schemes and what we're running," junior receiver Scotty McKnight said. "Everyone is starting to get on the same page and starting to understand what the offense is trying to do. If we just do our thing, I think we'll be able to make plays."

A healthy and more experienced offensive line has given Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen much better protection during camp.

"I think play-makers come from both athletic ability and how hard they work," Cody Hawkins said.

"This offense is going to give us a lot of opportunities to take advantage of the defense. Guys just have to make plays."

CU's final scrimmage on Aug. 29 is also closed.

"We do have a third scrimmage, but a lot of that is scout team looks on Colorado State stuff," Cody Hawkins said. "This is the last time we have a chance to go out full-on Colorado versus Colorado, so we're really going to cut it loose and see what we can do."

The defense is already preparing for whatever Kiesau has up his sleeve.

"The offense will probably open it up a little more, so we'll be looking for the defense to respond to that," senior linebacker Jeff Smart said. "If we can do that and get better and react to the offense, I think it will be a good sign."

Speedy still slowed

Rodney Stewart, who has been nursing a hamstring injury sustained during the first scrimmage a week ago, is not expected to participate tonight. The absence of "Speedy," the Buffs' leading rusher last season, isn't necessarily a bad thing at this stage of the season.

According to the coaching staff, Darrell Scott and Brian Lockridge have benefited from the extra repetitions in practice.

"Speedy's an electric player. Now the nice thing about it is Darrell has got a lot of reps, and I think that has helped him a lot. B-lock has been able to get a lot more reps," Dan Hawkins said. "You'd love to get Speedy going and get him into a little bit of a rhythm, but it's good for those other guys."

Hawkins and running backs coach Darian Hagan have said Demetrius Sumler is the most polished and consistent running back on the team.

"All those backs have not just an idea of what direction to go, but also what their footwork is and where their eyes should be and the nuances of plays," Hawkins said.

Notable

Stewart, wide receiver Terdema Ussery, offensive lineman Matt Bahr and defensive tackle/snapper Joe Silipo did not practice due to minor injuries but spent the bulk of practice pushing around wheelbarrows full of dirt. ...

A handful of true freshmen missed practice to attend orientation at CU. Classes begin on Monday. ...

The enormous permanent light fixtures on the east side of Folsom Field were raised on Wednesday. ... In addition to tonight's scrimmage, the Buffs will conduct a walk through this morning on the practice fields.



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Buff CBs gear up for Ram receivers

CU expected to be deep, experienced in secondary

By Ryan Thorburn
Thursday, August 20, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The Buffs are not listening to Steve Fairchild.

After Colorado State's first major scrimmage last Saturday, the second-year Rams head coach sounded like he was looking for a white flag to wave.

"Tell Dan (Hawkins) if we were playing tomorrow, it would be silly of me to call a pass play the way our quarterbacks are playing," Fairchild told reporters. "It was the absolute worst practice in my 30 years of coaching that I've seen at quarterback."

Billy Farris, last season's surprisingly smooth signal caller, is gone after throwing for 2,934 yards and 19 touchdowns in 2008. So is standout running back Gartrell Johnson, who was drafted by the San Diego Chargers after piling up 1,476 yards and 12 touchdowns to carry CSU to a 7-6 record.

Two other Rams who caused the Buffs some headaches over the years before injuries slowed them down, tight end Kory Sperry and running back Kyle Bell, are also out of eligibility.

But some CU players -- the ones who are supposed to have the shortest memories -- are already thinking about the Sept. 6 showdown at Folsom Field.

Despite Fairchild's public pessimism from Fort Collins, the cornerbacks in Boulder are gearing up to face CSU's dynamic wide receiver tandem of Rashaun Greer (1,114 yards, 17.7 yards per catch and three touchdowns last season) and Dion Morton (859 yards, 16.8 yards per catch and 10 touchdowns).

"They're very good receivers, and I'm looking forward to playing both of them," said junior cornerback Jimmy Smith, who sat out CU's 38-17 victory over the Rams at Invesco Field last season due to back spasms. "They have two very talented receivers that we watch on film. One is bigger, one is smaller and they both run pretty good routes. I'm looking forward to it. All of our corners are looking forward to it."

The matchup appears to be strength on strength.

Entering Dan Hawkins' fourth season, the Buffs appear to be thin and inexperienced along the defensive line, solid at linebacker and deep and experienced at cornerback with Smith, Benjamin Burney, Jalil Brown, Cha'pelle Brown, Anthony Perkins and Anthony Wright all back in the fold.

Having talent at cornerback will help not only in the opener, but also down the road when CU has to scheme for passing attacks led by names like Colt McCoy, Todd Reesing and Zac Robinson.

"You've got to be good at corner, and I think we're starting to kind of get four and five and six guys that can play back there," Hawkins said. "If you want to be able to hold up in coverage or with pressure, those guys have to be pretty good for you."

Even CU secondary coach Greg Brown, who usually plays things pretty close to the vest, is boastful about his cornerbacks these days. He is very pleased with the steady progress Jalil Brown has made since the staff stole the Phoenix-area prospect at the end of the 2006 recruiting cycle.

"We were fortunate to get that guy," Greg Brown said.

Jalil Brown played at South Mountain High School but was home schooled by his mother and grandfather. That might have scared some other programs away.

"I think it has helped me a lot in college," Brown, a junior majoring in sociology with a business minor said. "When you're being home schooled you have to do a lot of the work yourself. You're mom can tell you to do it, but you're the one that actually has to sit down and get it done."

"I think a lot of my friends here are busy trying to figure out how to get everything done. I feel like I know when it's time to sit down and study and get everything done that I need to."

Jalil Brown intercepted McCoy in the Texas game last season and returned the pick 57 yards. Smith smelled out a fake field goal attempt at Nebraska and scored a 58-yard touchdown. Cha'pelle Brown might be the most consistent of the bunch. And Burney, who redshirted last season due to numerous injuries, is healthy after starting 13 games in 2007.

"We went 5-7 last year and that was tough to watch," Burney said. "This year we do have a lot of ability. Now we have to see if we can play with it. It should be exciting."



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Longmont, Colorado
Thursday, August 20, 2009

Publish Date: 8/20/2009

Buffs RB Stewart targets Tuesday return

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — It's been a week since running back Rodney Stewart last practiced with the Colorado football team. Problem?

Maybe. Maybe not. Stewart said Wednesday the hamstring injury he suffered in last Thursday's scrimmage will keep him out until Tuesday. Speedy will miss today's second scrimmage of camp, leaving him only one more scrimmage in which to play before the Buffs host Colorado State on Sept. 6.

The Buffs practice once Friday and twice Saturday before they take Sunday and Monday off. Classes begin Monday.

CU coaches insist their backfield is deep and talented enough to be a primary strength. So missing 12 days of camp can't be a good thing for a back who wants carries come September, right? Stewart and running backs coach Darian Hagan say there's no cause for alarm.

"I'm taking a lot of mental reps," Stewart said. "They got me over there doing a lot of rehab. I don't think I'm missing a lot, to be honest with you."

Said Hagan: "(The time missed) sets him back mentally. Physically, it's like riding a bike. Once he's back into the swing of things, he'll be all right."

"But he's in every meeting, and he's taking every rep mentally when he's out here. He's not missing much. You don't want to rush a guy like him back. The way he runs, with that running style, that could set him back for awhile."

Asked if he's frustrated, Stewart simply said, "No."

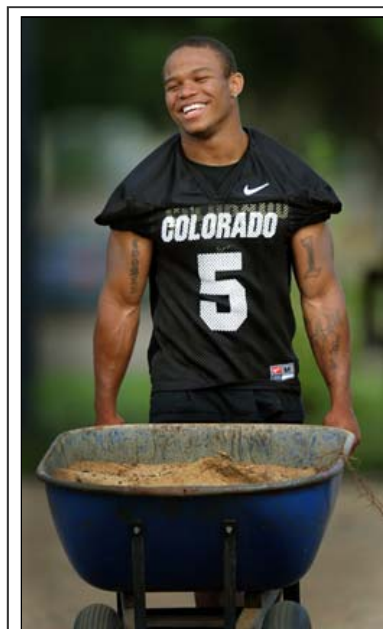
Stewart led CU with 622 rushing yards in 2008 despite missing the final three games with a broken leg. He averaged a team-best 4.71 yards per carry.

Hagan said Stewart is not falling behind Demetrius Sumler, Darrell Scott and Brian Lockridge. Hagan said Sumler has been battling a sore quad muscle that limited some of his work, too. He added it would not have kept Sumler out of a game, and Sumler practiced Wednesday morning.

Head coach Dan Hawkins noted the bright side of Stewart's absence.

"The nice thing about it is ... Darrell's gotten a lot of reps and I think that's helped him a lot," Hawkins said. "B-Lock's been able to get a lot more reps. Demetrius has always been pretty stable."

"You'd love to get Speedy going and let him get a little bit of a rhythm, but it's been good for those other guys."



Due to an injury, Colorado running back Rodney "Speedy" Stewart had to move sand for a portion of Wednesday's practice in Boulder.

Lewis Geyer/Times-Call

Each scrimmage is important, but Hagan said they won't be the final determination on who's the starter Sept. 6.

"We don't look at it that way because all of them are going to have specialized roles," Hagan said. "We just want them to be productive in their role and we want them to understand that we're looking for them to do good things and just be disciplined and don't blow assignments.

"If they do that, all four of those guys will play."

While Hagan won't commit to a starter yet, he doesn't try to hide which back he believes is playing best.

"Demetrius Sumler is by far ahead of the other guys," Hagan said "He just just knows everything, he does everything that you want without a problem.

"He's great in pass protection, fluid in the running. The other guys are still young; they're getting there. But we have to get those guys to stay disciplined all the time. They at times try to play outside the boundaries of our offense."

Why is Sumler, a fourth-year junior, so far ahead of the other three, who are all sophomores?

"He's a veteran," Hagan said. "A wily vet."

EXTRA POINTS: Junior linebacker Michael Sipili said he did not practice Tuesday or Wednesday due to a sprained right MCL he suffered Monday. He said it's not serious. He said he'll try to run Sunday and "see how it feels and go from there." ... CU announced today's scrimmage will be played in Folsom Field rather than at Regis High in Aurora, as it announced Tuesday. The scrimmage is staying on campus due to compliance reasons, CU reported. It remains closed to the public and media. CU will not provide reporters with statistics from it. ... CU reported nothing new regarding receiver Andre Simmons on Wednesday. ... Some Buffs, including freshmen receiver Will Jefferson and kicker Zach Grossnickle, missed practice time Tuesday and Wednesday to attend orientation. ... Hawkins said he wants to see execution in today's scrimmage. Asked if starting jobs can be won or lost, he said, "I think you can always solidify some things, I don't think there's any question about that. We look at that always. I think guys rise and fall during practice, we pay attention to that. I don't think you want to come out of a scrimmage and go, 'Hey, you're out,' or 'You're in.' You have to work on the body of work."

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

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[Mismatched cornerbacks spark Colorado's defensive growth](#)

August 19, 2009 5:14 PM

Posted by ESPN.com's Tim Griffin

They are perhaps the most dissimilar pair of cornerbacks in the Big 12.

Tall, angular Jimmy Smith and squat, speedy Cha'pelle Brown provide Colorado with one of the conference's best pairs of cover corners, even if they are complete physical opposites as football players.

"It's kind of funny the two of us are out there," the 6-foot-2, 205-pound Smith said. "We'd don't look much alike. But we do like to play in this defense and it's getting more comfortable for both of us."

The growth of the cornerbacks, former roommates and still best friends, will be pivotal as the Buffaloes attempt to confound skeptics and challenge for their first Big 12 North title since 2005.

If they get there, Smith and Brown will be key players as they face an almost constant bombardment in the pass-happy Big 12.

Colorado's unusual press coverage -- a marked contrast in today's game of college football which is overrun by zone defenses and a more conservative approach -- will have a role in any success this team has.

"It's a challenge for us, but it's a lot of fun," said the 5-foot-7, 175-pound Brown. "We are almost in more press (defense) than anybody in the country. We like to take the approach that we're an aggressive defense and we like to challenge other teams. They have to beat us."

Brown has particularly thrived in spring and summer workouts. He has the prototypical size to play cornerback in the NFL and he is adding the techniques as he becomes more proficient in the defense. He made three starts last season and racked up 39 tackles.

He's been called the team's fastest player by Colorado coaches. And as he becomes more accustomed to playing "on an island" in the press defense, he's becoming more confident.

"When you have a 6-foot-2 corner like me, it's tough for those guys to get off the line and get into their routes," Smith said. "It messes with them and their receivers because they can't get off the line. I definitely see those guys get frustrated as the game goes on. Corners get away with a lot of things in that five-yard zone close to the line of scrimmage. I try to get them mad and frustrated and off their game."

The play of the corners helped the Buffaloes lead the Big 12 in pass defense, surrendering 215.3 yards a game and 16 touchdown passes. Putting those numbers into context, Colorado ranked 72nd nationally. And in few other conferences do teams face the consistent barrage of high-powered passing attacks as in the Big 12, where no other defense ranked higher than 89th in pass defense.

But having confident cornerbacks who have worked together gives the Buffaloes additional confidence in their pass coverages.

Smith turned his season around last year, making a game-saving tackle that against Iowa State and having strong late-season games against Oklahoma State and Nebraska. He punctuated his season with a fumble recovery for a touchdown against the Cornhuskers.

• **Tim Griffin**



Tim Griffin joined ESPN.com in February

2008. He has covered the Big 12 since its inception, among a variety of beats during a 24-year career at the San Antonio Express-News. Griffin, a Memphis State University graduate, lives in San Antonio with his wife and son.

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"I know my confidence is up," Smith said. "I know I have to go out and perform and it seemed like everything started coming together for me last season. I feel much better out there."

He's been learning from the play of Brown, one of the steadiest members of the Buffaloes' team and the most veteran player of the secondary with 37 career games and 24 starts.

Brown led all returning Buffalo defensive backs with 84 tackles. And he had a knack for big plays, leading the team in third-down stops (14), passes broken up (10) and was tied for the team lead with two interceptions.

During the spring, he overcame a bout with giardia, an illness caused by a microscopic parasite the typically gets into a person's system by drinking contaminated food or drinking tainted water. It caused Brown to lose about 15 pounds.

But he says he's recovered and is ready to contribute to a secondary which should be an underrated strength for the Buffaloes.

Coach Dan Hawkins had been extremely confident in this group, which he has a stated goal of "10 wins and no excuses."

That confidence has also infused Brown with a similar attitude.

"We do have no excuses this year," Brown said. "It's been that way around here too long -- too many excuses about us being too young or whatever. I'm on my last year and I'm ready to go out and finally accomplish the goals that we've set."

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