

CU, CSU reach 10-year deal to play football

Showdown will return to Invesco Field in Denver next year

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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DENVER -- Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn says he didn't give his counterpart at Colorado State any ultimatums in negotiating a new 10-year agreement in football announced Monday.

Colorado State athletic director Paul Kowalczyk might have seen it more as a strong suggestion.

When Colorado announced a year ago that it was moving this season's game back to Boulder to keep its promise to fans to have at least six home games in Folsom Field, CSU said it would host the 2010 game in Fort Collins.

Kowalczyk indicated Monday that giving up the 2010 game in Fort Collins was a key to getting the new deal done with 10 consecutive games in Denver at Invesco Field from 2010 through 2019.

"Well, how about this option?" Kowalczyk asked a reporter inquiring about that angle. "If we play in Fort Collins in '10, there is no series. So how do we win? So we cut off our noses to spite our face? That's not smart and that doesn't help our program long term."

Asked whether the deal would not have moved forward without that concession, Kowalczyk said, "There were a lot of things discussed. Let's put it that way."

Bohn said CSU administrators had a willingness to work together that is the best he has seen since he has been in Boulder. He said he doesn't recall any communication between him and Kowalczyk that could have been construed as a threat to end the series.

"I don't recall that being an issue, but I don't speak for Colorado State," Bohn said.

CU agreed to scheduling the 2020 game in Fort Collins with the idea that CSU might be able to raise money and expand Hughes Stadium in the next decade. Playing at Hughes Stadium in 2010 was an unpopular idea outside of Fort Collins because the venue is tiny by major college standards. It seats fewer than 40,000 people and doesn't produce a significant enough revenue stream to make it a serious option.

Kowalczyk said a stadium expansion is possible but nothing is planned at this time.

"Things are going to change by then," he said. "Our program is going to be at a different level. That's the plan. We'll worry about that when we get there at this point."

CU makes about \$750,000 more when the game is played in Denver than when it is played in Boulder. CSU makes between \$800,000 and \$1 million more when the game is in Denver than when it hosts the contest in Fort Collins. CU is paying Colorado State \$650,000 to play in Boulder this year.

CSU also agreed to keep the same "55-45" ticket allotment in place over the life of the deal with the Buffs holding 55 percent of the tickets for each game and the Rams getting entitled to 45 percent of the total seats. CU gets a higher percentage because it has a larger season-ticket base.

Bohn said the schools prefer having control over seating and parking when the game is in Denver because they can better serve their season-ticket holders. Bohn said playing the CSU game in Denver for the next 10 years represents \$8 to \$10 million in additional revenue than if the game was played at campus sites in each of those years.

Other colleges have scheduled neutral site games in pro stadiums around the country and are paid millions of dollars by stadium owners and host groups, but the teams generally give up any control over ticket prices or ticket management in those cases. Bohn and Kowalczyk said the current model for the Rocky Mountain Showdown suits them best.

Bohn said CU not only remains committed to having six home games every year, it has improved upon that by providing at least seven

games at home or within 45 minutes of Boulder over the life of the new deal.

Bohn said playing more games at home is becoming the norm for teams in Bowl Championship Series conferences, with some of those teams scheduling as many as eight home games each year. Bohn said any time the Buffs travel outside the state it costs at least \$130,000 just for the flights.

"The competitive advantage cannot be underscored," he said. "We want to play at home. That's what our peers are doing in the Big 12 Conference, and we recognize that's going to require a change in how we do our scheduling, but we want to be in an environment to be competitive and play at home."

CU is in the process of reworking future schedules to accommodate the CSU series. The Buffs were slated to play Minnesota in 2012 and 2013, but that series is now being pushed back to 2020 and 2021. CU is in negotiations with other schools to fill some gaps, including a potential two-for-one deal with San Diego State. Playing a game in Southern California makes sense for the Buffs because a high percentage of CU players come from that area of the country.

Bohn said there might be years in the future where CU is forced to play a team from the Football Championship Subdivision (I-AA) to make schedules work. Bohn said he believes CU fans will support the program and buy tickets to those games.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins said he is happy with the agreement, though he still prefers games on campuses. Hawkins has faced CSU three times in Denver. This season's game will be his first on campus.

"I think when you look at the bigger picture, when you look at resources, when you look at fans, when you look at exposure, you look at college football here, I think it's a great decision," Hawkins said of the commitment to Denver.

Notable

Bohn said just under 3,000 tickets remain for Sunday's game. ... Bohn said 12,500 student season-tickets are sold out. ... Bohn said CU budgeted for a 10-percent drop in season-ticket sales this year, but the program is only about four percent behind last season and it could be as little as a two percent drop. ... Bohn said there is good news coming in fundraising. He said he is optimistic that groundbreaking for the new basketball practice facility at the Coors Events Center will come before Christmas.

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Ringo: One last glance into crystal ball

Kyle Ringo
Boulder Daily Camera

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Time to let the predictions fly.

Big 12 Conference football coaches conducted their first media teleconference of the 2009 season Monday morning and most of them sounded about as tired of answering what-ifs and what-about-asks as the reporters doing the asking.

One of the most ridiculous parts of covering college football is that you write stories for basically two months, if you count spring ball, without ever having a meaningful game to analyze and draw conclusions.

Sure, you get some direction from the spring game and more from preseason scrimmages, if you're allowed to see them, but nothing replaces the real thing in front of a packed stadium and a television audience on a fall Saturday.

Then and only then do you really begin to understand the truth about teams, players and coaches in terms of what they might be capable of on the football field.

But after watching all those practices for two months and spending time around a team, some gut feelings and expectations develop. Here are a few of mine looking ahead to the Buffs' 12-game schedule:

Quarterback Tyler Hansen will start the season opener for Colorado on Sunday night against Colorado State. It's a gut feeling that could be totally wrong. The sophomore seems to have made some significant progress and probably has a bigger upside in the long run than Cody Hawkins.

Hawkins will be needed at times this season and could be used in creative ways at other times.

Darrell Scott won't rush for 1,000 yards but will look much more like the player everyone expected him to be as a true freshman. Combine Scott with his other three backfield mates and the Buffs have a Rashaan Salaam-like 2,000-or-so yards on the ground.

The Buffs will finish 8-4 and will be in the mix for the Big 12 North Division title, along with Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. This could be another year where 4-4 or 5-3 in the conference wins it through tiebreakers.

The Buffs go from minus-seven in turnover ratio last year to plus-seven or better this season. Veteran linebackers and defensive backs find a way to win a few close games.

Place-kicker Aric Goodman rebounds from last year and a handful of missed field goals to have a pretty decent season culminating with a winning kick in either the Independence, Insight or Alamo bowl.

Now, we'll turn our attention to the opening set of Big 12 power rankings for the season.

1. Oklahoma State (last season 9-4) -- It's been a long time since anyone outside Austin, Texas, or Norman, Okla., has finished first in the South. I believe the Cowboys have the makeup to break the streak.

2. Texas (12-1) -- What's worse than getting left out of the conference title game and national championship the way the Longhorns did in 2008? Beating the arch-rival Sooners again and still finishing second.

3. Oklahoma (12-2) -- The three-time defending champs have to be the favorite in most minds. They're tough to bet against, but Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford won't have quite the same year with a new offensive line.

4. Kansas (8-5) -- Kansas is the logical choice as the first team from the North Division because of senior quarterback Todd Reesing, but I could see the Fighting Manginos finishing third or fourth in the division as well.

5. Texas Tech (11-2) -- You know, Mike Leach has taken his team to a bowl game every year at Texas Tech. This won't be the year the streak ends.

6. Colorado (5-7) -- Go ahead and call me a homer for putting the Buffs in the top half of the league. The way I see it, they could finish anywhere from third if things go well to ninth if it all falls apart again.

7. Missouri (10-4) -- The last two times I've seen this program play in person, it has won by the combined score of 113-10. I know there is a lot to replace, but I still see plenty of talent.

8. Nebraska (9-4) -- I totally believe all the hype surrounding this bunch would be totally different right now if not for that 57-yard kick last year to beat the Buffs. Plus, they're breaking in a new quarterback.

9. Baylor (4-8) -- Coach Art Briles ends the program's streak without a bowl game in its 15th year. The Bears pull off a few surprises on their way to the postseason.

10. Kansas State (5-7) -- If you use the lifetime batting average former CU coach and athletic director Eddie Crowder liked to employ, Bill Snyder will find a way around all the problems this program faces.

11. Texas A&M (4-8) -- Coach Mike Sherman finds himself on the hot seat at season's end not because it's the right approach but because that's the world in which we live and play these days.

12. Iowa State (2-10) -- Another dismal year for a school that ought to be traded to Mountain West for Texas Christian or Utah.

No depth-chart surprises

Colorado released its latest depth chart on Monday and there were no real surprises, but a few notes did catch the eye.

Sophomore Lagrone Shields and true freshman Forrest West are listed first and second at right defensive end. Shields has played a total of four snaps in his career.

Darrell Scott remains the backup punter after true freshman Zach Grossnickle struggled with hang time, distance and consistency throughout his first camp.

Walk-on place-kicker Ryan Aweida is listed second on the depth chart ahead of sophomore Jameson Davis, who still isn't completely healed from offseason knee surgery.

Coach Dan Hawkins said the depth chart was probably more difficult to settle this year as compared to past seasons in Boulder.

"It's much more competition," he said. "I think you have many more guys able to play."

Clemons putting UM to bed

CU wide receiver Toney Clemons became embroiled in the brewing investigation at Michigan this week when he confirmed reports that the program from which he transferred to CU requires players to dedicate more time than NCAA rules allow to practices, weight lifting and film study.

After being interviewed by an ESPN writer Sunday night, Clemons issued this statement through CU Monday.

"It was not my intention to come to the forefront of any situation dealing with the Michigan football program," he said. "I talked to a reporter Sunday night but did not answer any questions nor did I contribute any information. I don't have any ties to the original allegations and my involvement in the matter doesn't go any further than reading the article and confirming the allegations made by the anonymous sources.

"If I am asked to answer questions by any official party, be it the University of Michigan, the Big Ten or the NCAA, I will be honest about my schedule while at Michigan. But for right now, I am a Colorado Buffalo and no longer associated with Michigan or its football program. It's time for me to concentrate on my classes and my teammates here at Colorado."

Notable

Hawkins said he doesn't know when offensive lineman Max Tuioti-Mariner will be cleared to rejoin the team and practice. Tuioti-Mariner is recovering from two torn ACLs in the past year.

"They're doing rehab on him," Hawkins said. "We're not going to push that. We're just going to see how his knee comes along. I don't know the time line is on that."

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Q&A

Running with Ralphie: CU senior John Graves on football's best mascot

By **Melanie Asmar**, asmar@coloradodaily.com
Colorado Daily

Posted:08/30/2009 10:40:00 PM MDT

You have to be buff to handle Ralphie.

University of Colorado senior John Graves is a member of the team of 14 students who accompany the 3-year-old, 1,100-pound buffalo on her very fast run around Folsom Field before Buffs' football games.

Graves, a 22-year-old business management major from Centennial, runs what's known as the "loop position." It's his job to run behind Ralphie and slow her down using a sort of harness.

We caught up with Graves recently as he headed to a practice run with Ralphie V -- or, as the handlers call her, "Blackout," because of her dark coat -- before the Buffs' first game Sunday.

Q: Why did you apply to become a Ralphie handler?

A: It's the greatest tradition in college sports. We have tons of fun as Ralphie handlers. And we have an awesome football team. Leading the football team out onto the field is something else. Q: How fast do you have to run to keep up with her?

A: I like to tell people that if you're ever on a treadmill and you put it up as fast as you can go, we go faster than that. It's a combination of running extremely fast and taking long strides and letting her pull you. It all comes down to, hey, she's running it; we do what she says.

Q: Do you ever step in Ralphie poop?

A: Yes. That tends to happen every day. We go down and clean up her pasture where we keep her. We make sure the poop is all out of there, and it's nice and clean for her. It's typically a rookie (team member's) job to clean out her water trough and scoop the poop.

Q: Have you ever eaten a buffalo burger?

A: I have, yes.

Q: Would Ralphie object to that?

A: No, you know. We treat her very well. She's a pure buffalo. A lot of those buffalo used for meat, they're not pure buffalo. Ralphie, she's pure.

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colorado football

CU corners market at corner

Bufs' fab four in defensive backfield interchangeable in league with talented QBs

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/31/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT



During a defensive drill, Cha'pelle Brown, right, breaks up a pass intended for fellow cornerback Jimmy Smith. Brown is the shortest CB at 5-foot-7, but he "plays" big, says a teammate. (Joshua Lawton, The Daily Camera)

BOULDER — How's this for good timing? Colorado might have as much depth, experience and talent at cornerback as any team in the Big 12, at a time when the league's array of lethal quarterbacks is unmatched.

Cornerbacks vs. quarterbacks. The morning tongue twister remains on the minds of football

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coaches at all times. CU coach Dan Hawkins can rest easier, knowing that some combination of seniors Cha'pelle Brown and Benjamin Burney and juniors Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown will be in pass protection.

"(Cornerback) is a spot that you'd better really be good at," Hawkins said after a recent practice. "I think, O-line, D-line, quarterback, corner . . . you've got to have some depth, and you've got to have some

Colorado Football

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players there."

CU led the Big 12 in pass defense last season for all games (yielding 215.3 yards per game) despite Cha'pelle Brown playing four games with a broken finger and CU losing both starting safeties to injuries late in the season.

Colorado did not have Burney last year. A full-time starter in 2007, he redshirted last fall to heal from five offseason surgeries. In addition, Smith missed some time with back spasms.

CU's depth at cornerback prompted sophomore Anthony Wright to switch to wide receiver last week.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, not getting playing time behind those guys," Wright said. "I mean, look at them."

Size on Buffs' side

The first thing receivers and quarterbacks must notice is their size. Three of the four are big for a cornerback. At 6-feet-2 and 210 pounds, Smith resembles a linebacker. Jalil Brown is 6-1, 210, and Burney goes 5-11, 195.

OK, so Cha'pelle Brown is 5-7, 170. But teammates say watching him dunk a basketball is a sight to behold.

"With all of us except Cha'pelle being tall, it definitely gives us an advantage over smaller corners," Jalil Brown said. "Nowadays, you see a lot of receivers 200 pounds or bigger coming at

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you. Being big gives you an edge. And Cha'pelle *plays* big."

Although the quartet lacks the scintillating sprinter's speed, there is more than enough athleticism to be spectacular.

Smith, probably the best NFL prospect of the four, turned in one of college football's memorable moments in 2008 when he sniffed out a fake field goal by Nebraska. In full stride on a blitz, Smith grabbed the backward pitch in the air and returned it 58 yards for a touchdown.

Also on national television, Jalil Brown made a rare interception of a pass thrown by Texas' Colt McCoy, a Heisman Trophy finalist. Brown returned the pick 57 yards.

Cha'pelle Brown made Colorado history when his 27-yard interception return for a touchdown against Eastern Washington provided the winning points in a 31-24 game. As far as the CU sports information department can tell, that marked the first time the Buffs won a game on a defensive scoring play.

In 2007, Burney had four tackles for losses — tops among DBs. The son of former Broncos assistant coach Jacob Burney, he has a feel for being in the right place at the right time.

Depth, versatility a plus

"We feel good about the corners we've got," defensive secondary coach Greg Brown said. "The four guys have all been in big games and helped

us win big games."

Coach Brown loves versatility and has all four work on the right and left sides during practices. They also might get a few repetitions at safety.

"We bounce them around for the footwork," Brown said. "That way, it's not a total culture shock if all of a sudden (an injury occurs) and one of them has to play on the other side."

Colorado's fab four hopes to give Colorado State's new starting quarterback, Grant Stucker, fits during Sunday's season opener at Folsom Field.

Cha'pelle Brown, picked as a preseason all-Big 12 candidate by some college football magazines, said the foursome has a special chemistry.

"The thing about it is, we're all friends," Cha'pelle said. "There's no bickering going on. Whoever gets the job, gets the job. Most likely, everybody is going to play anyway. In the Big 12, going against those great quarterbacks, you're going to need a lot of cornerbacks."

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CU's top cornerbacks

CHA'PELLE BROWN, senior, 5-feet-7, 170 pounds, Los Altos (Calif.) HS. 2008: 12 starts, 84 tackles, two interceptions, 10 passes broken up. What you may not know: Brown once scored 58

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points in a prep basketball game and graduated as Los Altos' all-time leading scorer and assist man.

JALIL BROWN , junior, 6-1, 210, Phoenix (Ariz.) South Mountain HS. 2008: Six starts, 52 tackles, one interception, four passes broken up. What you may not know: Brown played offense and defense in high school, and as a tailback rushed for 1,910 yards and 29 touchdowns as a senior.

BENJAMIN BURNEY , senior, 5-11, 195, Mullen HS. 2007 (redshirted in 2008): 13 starts, 55 tackles, no interceptions, eight passes broken up. What you may not know: While recovering from five surgeries last year, Burney wrote a 500-page book and began shooting a full-length movie.

JIMMY SMITH , junior, 6-2, 210, Colton (Calif.) HS. 2008: Three starts, 39 tackles, no interceptions, five passes broken up. What you may not know: Majoring in sociology, Smith aspires to be an FBI agent.

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tv & radio - dusty saunders reports on the airwaves

Klatt not passing up work on national TV

By Dusty Saunders
The Denver Post

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Joel Klatt, CU's leading passer with 7,375 yards, will be part of the FSN coverage Sunday. (Denver Post file photo)

Joel Klatt quickly recalls his first appearance on national television. On Sept. 1, 2003, in his debut as the starting quarterback for the University of Colorado, Klatt threw four touchdown passes against Colorado State, including the winner in the final moments when the Buffaloes, on ESPN, beat the Rams 42-35.

Klatt returns to the national scene — and the CU-CSU rivalry — Sunday night in a different venue.

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The broadcasting booth has replaced the football field. Klatt will make his national network debut, working with Joel Meyers and Dave Lapham on FSN Rocky Mountain's telecast from Folsom Field.

Scenarios about athletes moving from college QB stardom to national broadcasting duties often are laced with "a dream come true" comment. But Klatt never had visions about sports TV work while growing up in Arvada or playing at CU. In 2006, Klatt, happy with a budding career in real estate, agreed to fill in for Dave Plati, CU's sports information director, on an Altitude panel dealing with college football.

"I really enjoyed myself," Klatt said. "When hearing from many that I handled myself well, I began to think about broadcasting as a partial career."

FSN Rocky Mountain, sensing Klatt's potential, signed him to a contract that initially included sideline reporting and analysis during the network's Colorado high school football coverage. He made his local FSN college debut in 2007 when CU played Kansas State.

Klatt has been a regular contributor to Rockies coverage as an analyst and reporter and has worked in a Dallas studio during Fox Sports Net's coverage of Big 12 games.

A three-sport star at Pomona High School, Klatt has never backed away from sports-oriented challenges. Following graduation, he signed a baseball contract with the San Diego Padres,

playing two years in the minor leagues.

"When I realized I would never make it in the majors, I decided to take a different path," he said.

That path took Klatt to Boulder in 2002, when he was a walk-on quarterback as a CU freshman. He became the starter in 2003, setting several CU passing records during his three seasons. Undrafted by the NFL, he tried out with the Detroit Lions and New Orleans Saints but never received a contract.

"At least I gave it a shot," Klatt said.

Klatt was at CU during the latter part of the Gary Barnett era, when the football program was under fire because of numerous off-the-field problems. "It was an education, learning how the media operates — good and bad," Klatt said. "Not everything that appears in print and broadcasting is the truth. So I'm very careful when presenting facts, figures and commentary."

Klatt doesn't worry about critics who say he will show a CU bias during Sunday's telecast.

"I'll be prepared to articulate what's happening on the field," he said. "The fact my alma mater is playing at Folsom Field won't impact my coverage. I've become media savvy."

Unexpected spotlight.

Little did NBC know during the spring that Sunday's Broncos-Bears game would have

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national attention.

"For a preseason contest, this should be as good as it gets," NBC's Al Michaels said last week.

His pregame comment: "Shakespeare never wrote a drama about a preseason football game. Had he, it would have been this game."

- I was disappointed Saturday night in KCNC-4's "special" about 50 seasons of the Broncos.

The half hour, loaded with commercials, was really a four-year history, centering on the team's first season (1960), the first Super Bowl season (1977), the 1996 season when the heavily favored Broncos lost their playoff opener and the first Super Bowl-winning season (1997). Much of this familiar material had been featured previously on the station's sports reports.

"The Broncos station" should have spent more time, energy and money chronicling all the years — including the fascinating Floyd Little era, the team's Super Bowl blowout losses and much more.

The way they were.

Before their five-game losing streak, the Rockies set an audience record on FSN Rocky Mountain on Tuesday. The team's 5-4 victory over the Dodgers in 10 innings was viewed in 150,000 area households on average. The audience peak: 195,000 homes between 9:45 p.m. and 10 p.m.



Troy Tulowitzki and the Rockies celebrate after beating the Dodgers in the 10th inning Tuesday. (Associated Press file photo)

The 14-inning victory over the Giants last Monday produced the fifth-largest Rockies audience for FSN Rocky Mountain.

Longtime Denver journalist Dusty Saunders writes about sports media each Monday in The Denver Post. Reach him at tvtime@comcast.net.

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August 31, 2009

CSU-CU series moving back to Denver

BY KELLY LYELL

KellyLyell@coloradoan.com

DENVER -- The Rocky Mountain Showdown is moving back to Denver's Invesco Field at Mile High Stadium next year for a 10-year run, under an agreement announced today by the Metro Denver Sports Commission and officials from both CSU and the University of Colorado.

Colorado State University athletic director Paul Kowalczyk said giving up next year's scheduled game against CU in Fort Collins, the last game the schools had agreed to play against one another, was a worthwhile tradeoff in the give and take of the negotiations, which have been going on for nearly a year. Details on all three contracts involved -- one with the Metro Denver Sports Commission, one with the city of Denver and Invesco Field and the game contract between the two schools -- were finalized Sunday night during a meeting at the stadium, CSU athletic director Paul Kowalczyk said.

"We're trying to build this program for the long-term," Kowalczyk said during a luncheon at Invesco, hosted by the sports commission.

CSU's Hughes Stadium seats 34,400, and Kowalczyk estimated the Rams would net about \$600,000 if they had played CU there next fall. Games between the two instate rivals at Invesco, Kowalczyk said, will bring in between \$1.2 million and \$1.4 million, depending on ticket sales and sponsorship agreements.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn, a one-time assistant AD at CSU, said the Buffaloes also stand to make more money -- about \$650,000 each year -- playing in Denver than at Folsom Field, which seats 53,750, provided the Buffaloes can play at least six other games on their home field each year to avoid refunding money to fans who purchased luxury boxes with a guarantee they'd get six home games a season.

Both schools are trying to increase their exposure and financial support in Denver, and Kowalczyk called the football game "a lynchpin" of that effort. CSU has more than 43,000 alumni in the Denver Metro area, said Joe Blake, chancellor of the CSU system. Many more metro area residents, Blake said, have connections to CSU in other ways.

"When this is being held here at Invesco Field, it just ignites, it accelerates, it activates that base," Blake said. "That's what you want -- to have alums who are proud of the institution to have a place to go express it, and that's what this does."

Bohn said CU also would like to see a Big 12 championship game come to Denver at some point, and said an annual game at Invesco Field would further that effort.

Return to www.coloradoan.com or see Tuesday's newspaper for details.

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Changes coming for Buffs' defense

By Patrick Ridgell

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BOULDER — There's going to be something new, something different, about the Colorado Buffaloes' defense in 2009.

They just won't yet divulge what it'll be.

"We expected a lot from our defense last year, and obviously, we didn't show up," linebacker Michael Sipili said. "We love this new defense right now. This new defense we got is real simple, real easy."

What's new about the defense?

"Just how everybody is there to stop the run," Sipili said. "I don't want to say too much about it."

Sipili might have said enough. A year after the Buffaloes fell to ninth in the Big 12 with a run defense that allowed teams to average 4.4 yards a carry and 166.2 per game, changes are expected. Especially for a program and coaching staff seeking a winning season for the first time in four seasons. CU opens 2009 Sunday at home against Colorado State. (5 p.m., FSN).

One change appears to be the team's mindset. The Buffs have stressed stopping the run for years. But they haven't allowed a team to average more than 4.4 yards a carry over a season since 1999, when they gave up 4.5 per carry.

Meanwhile, the Buffs gave up the fewest passing yards in the Big 12 last year, 215.3 per game, and ranked fifth in the conference in pass efficiency defense.

Are those numbers confusing? Not to fourth-year defensive coordinator Ron Collins. He dismisses the disparity in rankings between rushing and passing yards, saying it simply means opponents "could run the ball and run the clock, and we were in no position to do anything about it."

Collins added that many of those rush yards came late in the season when the Buffs trailed late in games. A good example: Oklahoma State ran for 226 yards on CU during its win in Boulder in November. The Cowboys never trailed that night.

Collins added that the responsibility isn't the defense's alone. The offense and special teams must help put the defense in spots to succeed, he said.

But some players suggest last year's emphasis was on stopping the pass in a pass-happy league, and that won't be the case in 2009.

"I think each year, your defense, your team, is going to have certain aspects of a game they're trying to stop," linebacker Marcus Burton said. "Last year, it was the pass for us. It was evident."

"I think this year, we're going back to hard-nosed football and playing the run."

Added Sipili: "We're not too worried about the passing game on the defensive side of the ball. Right now, our main goal is to stop the run."

Even Collins is fairly clear.

"We have to get down to where we can stop the run and force teams to throw the ball," Collins said. "That's our deal."

If that is the case — if the Buffs are bound and determined to stop the run once again — it could simply mean devoting more defenders to the effort. If so, that'll put a lot of pressure on the secondary, especially the corners, to defend the pass against Big 12 quarterbacks. CU faces three of the best in 2009 in Texas' Colt McCoy, Oklahoma State's Zac Robinson and Kansas' Todd Reesing.

Obviously, that'll require lots of confidence in the secondary. Coaches believe the secondary is strong.

"Does it make us nervous? No," cornerback Ben Burney said. "We have schemes, and we have stuff in where the safeties do things. We're really comfortable with it."

"When we go out there, it's about playing the game. If the run is the emphasis on first and second down, then always on third down, you have to stop the pass. That's a matter of making sure the offense doesn't get as much on first and second down, so we can do more on third downs."

CU coaches aren't going to reveal schemes. They just say they won't be easy to figure out.

"We'll be a wide variety of things," secondary coach Greg Brown said. "We never want to have it where somebody's going to be able to pin us down as to what we're doing."

"We feel good about the path we're on. We think we're on the right track, and we're building team chemistry and defensive unity. We feel like we're going to be OK."

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