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College football countdown: No. 74 Colorado



Dave Curtis

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Sporting News previews the Buffaloes as we count down [our preseason top 100 college football teams](#) leading into the season opener on Sept. 2.



Junior RB Rodney Stewart ran for 804 yards and nine touchdowns last season.

Last year: 4-8, 3-5

2010 projected record: 3-9, 2-6 (5th Big 12 North)

Why we know we're right: The [offensive line](#) stunk a year ago, allowing 44 sacks in 12 games, and all five starters are back. Then there's the defense, where a lack of discipline and speed hurt early in the season. The secondary must tackle better and force more turnovers, and defensive tackles Curtis Cunningham and Will Pericak must hold up better against the run.

Why we might be wrong: Dan Hawkins can showcase the most potent offense since he arrived in Boulder. The offensive line should be stronger and quicker, and the Buffs have an undisputed starting quarterback, senior Tyler Hansen, for the first time in three years. Expect this offense to finish far north of 92nd in scoring, as it did in 2009.

Our confidence level in this pick: Medium. Hawkins' charisma makes it easy to believe in the Buffs; recent history says otherwise. Returning starters often mean better performances. Even so, a date with Georgia plus trips to Missouri, Oklahoma and Nebraska would make a tough road for any team.

Judgment day: Sept. 4 vs. Colorado State at Denver. A home loss to the Rams last Labor Day weekend begat the loss at Toledo. And that led to a lost season. The Buffs need a win for stability's sake heading into the next week's trip to Cal.

Coach's [job security](#): Shaky. Hawkins, 16-33 in four seasons, was among the coaches most fortunate to survive after a 2009 dominated by penalties, turnovers and disappointment. Bank on calls for his job growing louder the moment the Buffs start slipping.

Grading the positions: QB (C), RB (B-), WR/TE (B-), OL (C), DL (C+), LB (C), DB (C), ST (F).

Dave Curtis is a writer for Sporting News. E-mail him at dcurtis@sportingnews.com.

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