

Bufs head to eye of Cyclones

CU needs strong effort from Stewart to end road woes

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/14/2009 12:03:13 AM MST

AMES, Iowa -- Rodney Stewart is entering new territory today.

The Colorado sophomore running back didn't get to play beyond the ninth game of the season during a strong freshman campaign a year ago because he broke his leg at Texas A&M in the first week of November.

Stewart is healthy entering the 10th game of this season today at Jack Trice Stadium on the Iowa State campus and his teammates need another strong performance from the 5-foot-6, 170-pound product of Westerville, Ohio, whom one observer earlier this season said "runs with fire in his eyes."

Stewart has produced four 100-yard rushing days this season, one of which came last week in a home win over Texas A&M. After that victory, he predicted the Buffs would follow up with a second consecutive victory, something they haven't done since winning three straight to start last season.

"I think our guys are maturing," Stewart said a week ago today. "Tyler (Hansen's) getting a lot more comfortable. We're getting more used to the game. So I think we're going to win the next game."

The Buffs will have to be much tougher today than they were three weeks ago when they came off a big win over Kansas only to follow up with a dud at Kansas State. Many of his teammates could take their cue about toughness from Stewart.

He doesn't inspire thoughts of Earl Campbell or Walter Payton, but many of his yards come after first contact. He sometimes resembles a pinball, but his ability to make defenders miss has been a big part of his success running behind a young offensive line for two years in row. Nearly half (288) of his 588 rushing yards this fall have come after first contact.

The Buffs are at their best when they're running the ball and generally the man doing the running is Stewart. He has carried the ball 149 times with the other tailbacks on the roster (including former Buff Darrell Scott) combining for only 26 attempts. Stewart could pass his freshman total of 622 yards today against an Iowa State defense that ranks 93rd in the nation against the run. The Cyclones allow 170 yards a game on the ground.

It's no coincidence Colorado's three wins this season have come in three of the four games in which the offense has rushed more times than it has passed. The only exception was at Texas, where mistakes at quarterback and two special teams gaffes probably cost the team a win.

Today's game won't be televised, but fans can participate in a live chat throughout the contest on Buff-

[zone.com](http://www.buffzone.com) with our reporter at the game. The chat begins prior to the noon kickoff.

Colorado (3-6, 2-3) must win today to keep its hopes of a bowl berth and winning the Big 12 North Division title alive. Kansas State can eliminate the Buffs from contention for the division title with a win today at home against Missouri, regardless of the outcome of the CU game.

For the second consecutive week, the Buffs are facing a team that can become bowl eligible with a victory. First-year ISU coach Paul Rhoads has the Cyclones at 5-5 overall and poised to reach a bowl game for the first time since the 2005 season. Today is almost as important for IowaState as it is for Colorado because the Cyclones must finish the season with a road game at Missouri next week, where they haven't won since 2001.

"They certainly have played well this year and earned their stripes," coach Dan Hawkins said. "Our backs are against the wall and they're trying to get bowl eligible. A lot things are on the line for both football teams."

Iowa State is a lot like Colorado in needing to run the ball well to find success. Tailback Alexander Robinson and quarterback Austen Arnaud form a difficult combination to contain. The Cyclones average 186 yards on the ground, third in the Big 12 Conference.

"We've got to play technique-sound football and make tackles," CU cornerback Jimmy Smith said. "That's the only way you can stop that kind of running team."

The Buffs have an 11-game losing streak outside the state of Colorado. The streak started here two years ago when they surrendered a 21-point halftime lead and lost 31-28. The program has won only twice in true road games in four seasons under Hawkins and has a 2-17 record on the road since the start of the Hawkins' era.

It has been more than two years since the Buffs won on the road at Texas Tech in late October 2007.

The Buffs also haven't won consecutive games since starting the 2008 season 3-0. They have a chance to follow up a rousing fourth-quarter rally last week by breaking all of these streaks today.

These teams are evenly matched aside from the Buffs' inability to win on the road. Iowa State took CU to the wire last season at Folsom Field with the game being decided on a goal-line stand by the Buffs on the final play. Smith made the game-winning tackle.

Many of those Cyclones are back today and eager for some payback, and they have the added incentive of ISU celebrating senior day today.

Colorado quarterback Tyler Hansen gets his second shot at the Cyclones. He started last season's game in Boulder, but was replaced by Cody Hawkins in the second half after an ineffective first half. His playing time diminished from that point on.

Hansen is coming off his best performance as a Buff against the Aggies last week, leading his team to a fourth-quarter comeback. He produced 315 yards of total offense and had a 100-yard rushing day before yardage of the eight sacks he absorbed was subtracted.

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Woelk: Only goal today should be improvement

Neill Woelk
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/14/2009 12:04:04 AM MST

Of all things perplexing and puzzling in the Dan Hawkins era at Colorado, the most frustrating to fans might be that Hawk's teams have never displayed a strong sense of improvement down the stretch.

If the old maxim "the games they remember are played in November" is true, then the Buffs have been mostly forgettable in recent years.

Prior to this season, the Buffs were 3-7 in the month to remember under Hawkins, with one win coming in each of his first three seasons. During that period, CU's stretch runs have consisted more of stumbles than surges.

But last weekend, CU opened November with a win over Texas A&M. Thus, the Buffs today can do something they've yet to do under Hawkins -- win two games in the month that usually determines whether a team's season is considered a success.

It's one of a long list of things the Buffs can accomplish today in a stadium that has been none too kind to them in recent years.

A win today would:

Keep CU's faint bowl eligibility hopes alive.

End a road game drought that stretches back to Hawkins' second year in Boulder.

Possibly keep the Buffs at least mathematically in the hunt for a Big12 North title (depending on the outcome of the K-State-Missouri game).

Provide some kind of indication that this team is actually improving down the stretch.

Now, forget the first three. The act of looking ahead to Oklahoma State and/or Nebraska -- anywhere past Jack Trice Stadium, to be exact -- is folly. All those things will matter not a whit if the Buffs don't concentrate on the one thing they can control today: the simple process of improvement.

Start with the offense. The Buffs last week put together by far their most complete game of the season. In the win over Texas A&M, the Buffs had the ball on 12 meaningful possessions (not counting those that ended each half). Of those drives, CU produced points on six of them -- and every scoring drive was at least 50 yards.

That's six scoring drives averaging roughly eight plays and 66 yards per drive. That's the type of consistency that's been absent all season -- but the type that must be produced again today.

We'd love to see another step forward in Eric Kiesau's game plan. More of the designed runs for quarterback Tyler Hansen that keep defenses honest. More of those quick openers to running back Rodney Stewart, more stretching the field with Markques Simas and more key completions to tight ends.

Simply, more utilization of the weapons at hand.

Ditto for the defense. CU's defense last week was stellar in backs-to-the-wall situations. Twice, the Buffs held the Aggies to field goals in crucial situations, and another time, they held the line on fourth-and-goal from the 1-yard line.

And, they won the turnover battle, producing a huge interception in the final minutes before the special teams came up with a game-clinching fumble.

Those are the types of things Buff fans expected to see much earlier in the season, but instead have been treated to only sparingly.

Now the Buffs must display consistency.

All week long, CU's players talked of treating the rest of this season like a playoff situation. Every game a win-or-go-home scenario.

Today, the goal is actually a simple one. Improve upon last week's performance.

Do that, and they should win.

Then they can worry about next week.

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cu football

Buffaloes need to avoid sack stampede

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 11/14/2009 01:00:00 AM MST



CU quarterback Tyler Hansen is taking a pounding in the pocket, getting sacked 16 times in two games. (RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post)

On Sunday mornings, Colorado sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen must feel like he has been hit by a train. Considering the combined weight of all those Missouri and Texas A&M defenders who landed on him the past two

weekends, it's a wonder Hansen can drag himself out of bed.

"I haven't been getting much sleep the first night after we play," Hansen said. "I've been pretty sore, pretty banged up."

Hansen, 6-feet-1 and 205 pounds, was sacked eight times in each of the past two games. Sometimes, he got up limping, but at least he got up. Can coach Dan Hawkins and his staff bear to watch? Ugly scabs on Hansen's legs and elbows never get a chance to heal because they break open again every Saturday. He doesn't complain.

"Tyler is a tough kid," Hawkins said.

He had better be. Entering the weekend, Colorado (3-6, 2-3 Big 12) ranked 118th among the 120 Bowl Subdivision teams in sacks allowed. The Buffaloes have yielded 36 sacks in nine games, an average of 4.0 sacks per start. Only Miami of Ohio (4.7 per game) and Washington State (5.0) have been worse at protecting the passer.

Today's host, Iowa State, uses an undersized defensive front and ranks last among Big 12 teams in sacks (12 in 10 games). But taking nothing for granted, Colorado coaches allocated additional practice time to pass protection this week.

And that didn't involve only offensive linemen. Statistics charted by the CU sports information department revealed that the O-line has been

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responsible for only 19 1/2 of the 36 sacks allowed. Tight ends have missed blocks. Running backs have failed to pick up blitzing safeties and linebackers.

"And I can get rid of the ball faster at times," said Hansen, who has been the target of 26 sacks. "Sacks aren't just on the offensive linemen. I know people think it is, but it's on all the players out there."

The complex dynamic of teamwork and synchronization requires more than a quick fix.

"It takes

QBs under fire

Colorado's 36 sacks allowed this season rank third to last in college football's top division:

Opponent	Sacks	Yds.
Colorado State	4	38
at Toledo	3	23
Wyoming	1	6
at West Virginia	2	19
at Texas	3	29
Kansas	3	30
at Kansas State	4	32
Missouri	8	73
Texas A&M	8	60

CU sports information

11 players," offensive line coach Denver Johnson said. "Yes, we've had our share (of mistakes), but it's been pretty widespread. Collectively, we just have to keep hammering it out."

As for his guys, Johnson wants each lineman to take ownership of his one-on-one matchup.

"When you boil it down to gravy, you have to win your battle," Johnson said. "As an individual, you have to prevail against the guy you're assigned to protect. It really is as simple as that. There's no magic wand. You either whip him, or he whips you."

Iowa State's defense doesn't blitz as often as some Big 12 teams. But considering CU's protection woes of the past two weeks, sophomore lineman Matt Bahr expects the Cyclones "to bring the house" today.

"They've seen the film and seen blitzes and things that we haven't picked up," Bahr said. "There's no doubt they're going to come after us. Every team will do that."

"It's not the same problem each time. It's one guy being beat here, one guy getting beat there. I think it's really a focus issue. We need to focus on every play, picking up the right guys on every play."

In addition to the lost yardage and contributing to Hansen's bumps and bruises, allowing a sack can be demoralizing to the entire offense.

"There's a psychological aspect to it," junior receiver Scotty McKnight said. "Your quarterback is down on the ground. You have to help him get up. Not good."

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Buffs' offense still seeking its identity

By Patrick Ridgell
 © 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — It was early August when Colorado offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau had a clear vision for 2009.

He said the offense would be different from those of the rest of the Big 12. He wanted to run the ball. He wanted the Buffs to forge an identity by tailoring an attack that suited their talent.

That was then. This is now.

The Buffs have changed quarterbacks. The tailback who best suited the power running attack they sought got hurt, then quit. Inexperience burdens the offensive line. Wide receivers who were supposed to help couldn't get enrolled in time for camp. Some suffered injuries. Others haven't developed.

So every day, Kiesau heeds a note jotted across the board in his office. It says, "Show progress and show improvement."

This may not be the kind of goals he envisioned for this point of the season, for today, when CU visits Iowa State in its 10th game of the season. But in this very strange season of CU football, that's what it is.

"It's been a struggle, I'm not going to lie," Kiesau said.

"I did want people to know that when they came to a football game, they would know exactly what to expect. I would say it changed a little bit.

"What I wanted to do was come in and establish the run game. That's very hard, especially early in the season when we were down by a lot of points and we had to throw the ball and get that going. That was tough to do. If you're down by 30, you can't be running the ball every down."

On Nov. 1, the day after Missouri beat the Buffs, Kiesau said it was his responsibility to turn things around. The next week against Texas A&M, the Buffs totaled 437 yards, even with losing 60 due to eight sacks. It was their most in a Big 12 game. It might have come against the league's worst defense, but it was still improvement.

CU enters today 11th in the league in points (23.3 per game) and last in yards (302.9). The Buffaloes have finished last in the Big 12 in points and yards in two of the three previous seasons. Last year's averages were 20.2 points and 318.5 yards, both league lows.

Countdown to kickoff

Colorado (3-6, 2-3)
 at Iowa State (5-5, 2-4)

When: Today, noon

Where: Jack Trice Stadium, Ames, Iowa

TV/Radio: No TV/KOA-AM

The series: CU leads 48-14-1, 24-8 in Ames. The home team has won the past five meetings in the series.

In the spotlight: CU — the offensive line: The Buffs' front is not totally responsible for the 16 sacks the past two games, but it must play better. Also, CU averages only 86.2 rushing yards per game. It needs to open some holes.

Iowa State — RB Alexander Robinson: He's third in the Big 12 with 96 rushing yards per game, and the Buffs allow 151.6 per, ninth most in the league.

When CU has the ball: The Buffs had their best day in weeks last Saturday against Texas A&M, but A&M gives up lots of big games to opposing offenses. Iowa State allows more rushing yards than any team in the Big 12. Turnovers are key today. CU owns the Big 12's worst margin at minus-6, while Iowa State is third best, with plus-6. Iowa State forced eight turnovers in its win at Nebraska and picked off three passes to beat Baylor.

Advantage: Iowa State

When Iowa State has the ball: Iowa State QB Austen Arnaud is the kind of dual threat who can cause problems. He's rushed for 437 yards and thrown for 1,434, placing him seventh in the Big 12 in total offense. Iowa State

The big deficits to which Kiesau referred have been one of many problems. Others include CU's lack of playmakers, which made Markques Simas' breakout performance last weekend even more remarkable. And the Buffs have given up a league-high 36 sacks, which was the hot topic in recent days.

The consensus is everyone has a hand in causing those sacks. CU fully expects Iowa State to blitz a lot today.

Changing quarterbacks from Cody Hawkins to Tyler Hansen did not drastically change what the Buffs want to do when they get the ball, Kiesau said. It sounds like it changed the identity, though. Asked to define the offense's identity today, he has a simple label.

"Creative," he said.

"We're just trying to be creative. If you look at the last two games, we stayed within our system but have been more creative throughout."

Kiesau is not looking forward to spring ball, when an experienced, presumably healthy group returns to further hone what it's learned so far. Don't take that the wrong way. The coach wants to build today on what happened against Texas A&M. He doesn't want to wait until spring.

"I'm looking forward to this weekend," he said.

"We just have to keep staying the course. I know it sounds very generic, but it's true. When you have a young team, you have to stick with it to believe and keep going.

"Yes, it has been frustrating, with the injuries, rotating the O-line, the struggles on the O-line, the running backs — a lot of factors go into that. It has been frustrating from that standpoint. But I think if we continue to stay the course and continue to work hard, it'll be evident."

Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

emphasizes the run. It's third in the Big 12 and 29th nationally with 185.7 rushing yards a game. CU has had its moments but overall has not been as stingy against the run as it wants to be.

Advantage: Iowa State

Special teams: The Buffs have allowed special teams touchdowns each of the past two weeks, including Texas A&M's 99-yard kickoff return. CU's kickoff return is nowhere near as dangerous as it was before Darrell Scott left. CU PK Aric Goodman is performing well in 2009. Iowa State's punting is much better than CU's, but the Cyclones have struggled with field goals and extra points.

Advantage: Iowa State.

Key matchup: CU run defense vs. Iowa State run offense: The Buffs should relish a matchup against an opponent that's set on running the ball.

Prediction: Statistics aren't as important as CU's road mentality. Based on CU's past 10 road trips — all losses — it's impossible to pick the Buffs here.

Iowa State 28, CU 20.

Patrick Ridgell

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Postseason on the line

Bufs need to win-out to stay bowl-eligible

By Alex K.W. Schultz on November 13, 2009

Tyler Hansen is thinking redemption.

Whatever motivation Hansen, the Colorado Buffaloes sophomore quarterback, can muster, CU head coach Dan Hawkins will take it.

Hansen, who completed 4-of-12 passes for 48 yards and an interception last season against the Iowa State Cyclones in Boulder, was yanked in the second half and was replaced by then-sophomore teammate Cody Hawkins.

Hansen will have a second crack at ISU on Saturday at noon MST in Ames, Iowa, and the 19-year-old said he is ready to supplant last year's memories with some better ones.



Sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen dashes through the Texas A&M defense in a bid to get the ball down the field Saturday. (CU Independent/Lee Pruitt)

"I haven't really thought about it until today," Hansen said Wednesday of his performance against the Cyclones. "We were watching film, and I said, 'Dang.' I didn't play as well as I should have. I'm going to come in with some swagger. I definitely want to get these guys."

Much is at stake for both teams.

ISU (5-5, 2-4 Big 12 Conference) is one win away from becoming bowl-eligible, but it closes out the season Nov. 21 against a tough Missouri Tigers squad.

The Buffs (3-6, 2-3) must win their last three contests to keep their postseason hopes alive, but they finish up against the Oklahoma State Cowboys and the Nebraska Cornhuskers, who currently have a combined 13-5 record.

With their backs against the wall, CU sophomore wide receiver Markques Simas said he is treating the team's situation as motivation.

"We're using that as fuel," Simas said. "No one wants to go home early. We want to be out here practicing in December."

Dan Hawkins said he has preached a slightly different message to his players this week.

"The message is always a little bit different," Hawkins said. "There are different factors that go into each week, and you have to address those things."

While it may be a long shot, the Buffs can still win the Big 12 North division if all of the chips fall correctly. CU must win out and the Kansas State Wildcats need to lose their last pair to the Huskers and Tigers.

While CU has little control over the conference outcome, Hansen said a win against the Cyclones would be significant.

"It'd give us a lot more confidence," Hansen said. "Our season's on the line."

The Buffs lead the all-time series against ISU 48-14-1, but the home team has won the last five meetings.

The previous two meetings between the two teams have been nothing short of thrilling.

In 2007 in Ames, then CU kicker Kevin Eberhart deposited a 50-yard field goal between the uprights with the clock winding down, but the Buffs were called for delay of game and was pushed back 5 yards. Eberhart drilled a 55-yarder as CU quickly lined up again, but the officials ruled the final second had ticked off the clock before the ball was snapped. ISU rallied from a 21-0 deficit at the half to win 31-28.

Last year at Folsom Field, ISU marched to the Buffs' 1-yard line with 3 seconds to go. On the last play of the game, then-sophomore Cyclones running back Alexander Robinson was stuffed for a loss and the Buffs held on to win 28-24.

Simas said this weekend's outcome will hinge on how each team plays out of the gates.

"We just have to have a higher sense of urgency," Simas said "We know this is a big game for us. We know what we have to do. Hopefully we'll get off to a fast start and get rolling."

Simas had a breakout game last weekend against the Texas A&M Aggies. The sophomore snagged seven passes for 135 yards. His previous best performance was three catches for 47 yards on Oct. 17 against the Kansas Jayhawks.

"I've been waiting for that," Simas said. "That's a confidence booster for everybody. I've been practicing this week like a big-time playmaker. If you don't practice like a big-time playmaker, you won't be one on game days."

Inconsistency has been another headline for both squads.

CU, which is last in the Big 12 in total offense at just over 302 yards per game, is coming off a game in which it churned out 437 yards of offense.

The Cyclones, who are averaging 21.2 points per game — which is last in the Big 12, have scored 8, 10 and 9 points in their last three contests.

The message for the Buffs, however, is still the same.

"It's like playoff football in high school," Hansen said. "You win and move on, or you lose and go home."

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer Alex Schultz at Alexander.schultz@colorado.edu.

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Friday, November 13, 2009

Simas sparks CU's offensive renaissance

By Tim Griffin
ESPN.com

Maybe there was something in those lucky puka shells that [Markques Simas'](#) mother brought him before the Texas A&M game.

Simas, Colorado's sophomore wide receiver, had been beset by struggles and bad luck since he arrived at college. But the talisman brought from her recent trip to Hawaii seemed to transform Simas' fortunes as soon as he started wearing them.

"I wore them to the hotel before the game and then everything seemed to change," Simas said with a chuckle. "That might have been the reason."

Or it might have been the product of Simas' hard work, preparation and his patience. But whatever the cause, Simas erupted for a career-best seven receptions for 135 yards, bringing an element of a vertical game that helped spark the Buffaloes' wild 35-34 comeback victory over Texas A&M.

Simas was one of the top recent recruits at Colorado after a standout career at Mira Mesa High School in San Diego. But he never could get a shot at playing time after sitting out the 2007 season as a redshirt, missing last season while he was academically ineligible. His hopes for playing time were set back when he was suspended for the first two games of this season for an undisclosed violation of team rules.



Colorado wide receiver Markques Simas' luck appears to have changed for the better recently.

"It feels good to be able to come back and produce," Simas said. "I feel like I wasted a year on some dumb things. It's just rewarding to come back and do some things to help us out. I wanted to show it just wasn't hype -- that I could fulfill what everybody was saying about me."

The big game against the Aggies enabled him to more than double his previous yearly receiving total for any previous game. And his knack for making big plays was critical in enabling Colorado to overcome an 11-point halftime lead and a 10-point deficit midway through the fourth quarter.

His breakout game appears to have brought some explosiveness back to a Colorado team that has struggled making big plays all season. [Scotty McKnight](#) has been the Buffaloes' top receiver, but the 6-foot-2, 215 Simas can stretch defenses as well as outfight them for positioning.

Working with quarterback [Tyler Hansen](#), Simas seems to have made an immediate connection with the Buffaloes' new starter.

It showed last week when he produced key catches of 47 and 45 yards that ranked as the two longest passes of the season for the Buffaloes. The 45-yarder came on a key third-and-16 late in the fourth

quarter, setting up Colorado's game-winning touchdown on the next play.

"I felt like I'm a guy who can stretch the field and open the offense up a little bit," Simas said. "Almost every other team was double-covering Scotty. It also helps our running game. They can't load up the box like they have before, so it lets us be more balanced and play to our potential."

Coach Dan Hawkins, who also doubles as Simas' position coach, said he has been pleased with his recent surge but expects much more.

"I thought it was great, what he is capable of, but we also talk about things that happen in the game that he can do and do better," Hawkins said. "That's just kind of the approach we take with him, but it was great for him to break out a little bit."

The late charge enabled Colorado to keep its flickering bowl hopes alive. The 3-6 Buffaloes could still win the Big 12 North if they can win out and Kansas State loses its last two games.

Their first step will come Saturday at Iowa State, where the Cyclones will be attempting to earn bowl-eligibility for the first time since 2005 with a victory. A loss would eliminate the Buffaloes from bowl contention.

"We've got an urgency coming into the game, but we're very confident coming into Iowa State," Simas said. "We still feel like we have a lot to play for."

A similar resolve has marked Simas' attitude since his return.

"Coming here definitely helped me mature," Simas said. "I came in here young, dumb and worried about a lot of other things. But what I've gone through has given me an urgency to produce. There's no time to waste."

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