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cu football

CU Buffs rank No. 119 in penalties among major-college teams

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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CU coach Dan Hawkins watched his team commit 11 penalties Saturday in a 17-10 loss at Iowa State. (Charlie Neibergall, The Associated Press)

It could be said that the struggling Colorado football program has been consistent in at least

one aspect of the game.

Penalties.

Flags have been flying all season, but the Buffaloes (3-7, 2-4 Big 12) have just about reached rock bottom. After committing 11 penalties for 110 yards Saturday in a 17-10 loss at Iowa State, CU is 119th in penalties among the 120 Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS, formerly Division I-A) teams.

"That kills us," CU sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen said Saturday when asked about penalties.

Colorado has been flagged 93 times in 10 games, an average of 9.3 penalties per game. Only Texas Tech has been penalized more often than Colorado. Texas Tech averages 9.7 flags per game.

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Focus, or a lack thereof, continues to be a problem, CU junior wide receiver Scotty McKnight said Saturday.

"It's not like guys don't care," McKnight said. "We have to find a way to make plays, not penalties. There were too many turnovers, too many penalties to win a football game."

As for turnovers, Colorado committed three

against Iowa State. The Buffs rank 116th among FBS teams in turnovers lost, with 27. Only Hawaii (28), Washington State (28), Purdue (29) and Miami of Ohio (34) have been sloppier with ball security.

Three CU penalties totaling 25 yards aided Iowa State's first-quarter touchdown. And consecutive flags for a personal foul and then unsportsmanlike conduct against redshirt freshman offensive tackle Bryce Givens nullified a third-quarter scramble by Hansen inside the Cyclones' 5-yard line.

Colorado coaches point to the youth of the roster. But those who witnessed the Buffs' loss at Iowa State couldn't find much evidence of improvement. CU's defense played well enough in road games against Kansas State (a 20-6 loss) and Saturday in Ames, but the Buffs' offense got stuck in neutral.

"Turnovers and penalties took the air out of our bubble," sophomore wide receiver Markques Simas said Saturday.

Eliminated from bowl eligibility, Colorado plays Thursday night at No. 12 Oklahoma State. In four seasons under Dan Hawkins, the Buffs are 2-19 outside the state of Colorado, including the 2007 Independence Bowl loss. That's a current streak of 12 straight road losses, dating to a 2007 win at Texas Tech.

"There's something about this away thing," CU offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said Saturday

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during postgame interviews. "I don't know what it is. But we have to figure it out fast."

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Eye on: The Cowboys

Colorado at No. 12 Oklahoma St., 5:45 p.m. Thurs., ESPN

For the record: Oklahoma State (8-2, 5-1 Big 12) beat Texas Tech 24-17 on Saturday to remain in second place in the Big 12 South. The 12th-ranked Cowboys jumped five spots this week in the AP poll.

Streaking: The Cowboys have won at least seven games in four consecutive years for the first time in school history.

Who's hot: Texas Tech tried to pick on Cowboys cornerback Perrish Cox. Big mistake. Cox intercepted two passes and had three pass breakups.

What's not: Oklahoma State's pass rush. The Cowboys entered last weekend tied for ninth in sacks among Big 12 teams with 18. They got just one Saturday even though Texas Tech called 59 passes.

Key stat: The Big 12 leader in rushing, OSU had 243 yards on 60 attempts Saturday.

FYI: Against Texas Tech, senior QB Zac

Robinson had almost as many rushes as he did pass attempts, and he had better production on the ground. The former Chatfield High School star ran 19 times for 99 yards. He completed 9-of-21 passes for 90 yards.

Coachspeak: "He ran tonight somewhat like he did as a sophomore. Because of that, we were able to win the football game. His ability to scramble was the difference." — Cowboys coach Mike Gundy, on Robinson

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

CU game-by-game penalties Opponent Pen. Yds. Result

Colorado State 5 60 L, 23-17

at Toledo 9 100 L, 54-38

Wyoming 10 86 W, 24-0

at West Virginia 5 29 L, 35-24

at Texas 20 140 L, 38-14

Kansas 8 60 W, 34-30

at Kansas State 8 69 L, 20-6

Missouri 7 45 L, 36-17

Texas A&M 10 94 W, 35-34

at Iowa State 11 110 L, 17-10

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CU football players shoulder blame for woes

Bufs trying to focus on OSU, not coaching questions

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/15/2009 11:52:36 PM MST

Colorado football players continued to take the blame Sunday for their struggles on the field this season hoping to derail growing public dissatisfaction with their coaches.

Coach Dan Hawkins' job appears to be in jeopardy with his team at 3-7 overall and out of the postseason for the third time in his four years in Boulder.

Numerous players spoke with the Camera at the Dal Ward Center late in the afternoon as they reported for a team dinner, weight lifting, film review and meetings in the practice bubble.

Every player said firing Hawkins and his staff now or at the end of the season would be the wrong decision by athletic department and school administrators. The players agreed the coaching staff bears some of the responsibility for the season going so wrong, but they also argued that players have to hold up their end of the deal or it doesn't matter how good the coaches are.

"It's not just one reason that we lose these games," middle linebacker and tri-captain Jeff Smart said. "It's not all on the coaches. There also has to be some accountability from us. We just flat out have to play better. The coaches can coach as hard as they can, but when it comes down to it, we're the guys out on the field making the plays. In my mind, that is really the biggest part of it."

But what about the idea that it is the coaches' job to get the players to play better and improve over the course of the season? That doesn't seem to be happening with this inconsistent and penalty prone team.

"Once again, I would argue that the coaches only can do so much," Smart said. "I think these coaches are doing everything right, especially defensively since I play defense. They put us in the right positions. They make the right calls. It's up to us to make the plays that we're in position to make and execute our assignments and our techniques correctly."

Quarterback Tyler Hansen said coaches have tried numerous tactics and approaches with the team over the course of the season to correct penalties and missed assignments that continue to be a problem.

"Pretty much all the stuff that has been going wrong is on us," Hansen said. "We know that and they know that, but they're going to take the blame for it because they're the coaches and they're supposed to, but it's really on us."

Speculation about the fate of the coaching staff is everywhere on campus these days and players are having a difficult time escaping it. With only two weeks remaining in the season, it's likely the coaching situation will become a focal point of most interviews.

Tailback Brian Lockridge said he is asked about the coaching staff's job security all the time. He said it wouldn't matter if Pete Carroll was hired away from Southern Cal, the results on the field would still be based on whether players come prepared to play each week.

"I totally believe in the coaching staff here," he said. "No matter what, if we have a new coaching staff or not, it won't make a difference. The only thing that is going to make a difference is if us as players go out there and change our attitude and change the way we play."

Opinions were mixed from players who talked with the Camera on Sunday in regard to whether it would be best for athletic director Mike Bohn to make a decision about the future of the staff now or wait until the end of the season. Hansen said he hopes Bohn will end the speculation and conjecture with a strong show of support for the coaches.

"I think if some administrator or Bohn comes out and says, 'Hawkins is our guy for the future' and really displays that kind

of solidarity in the situation, that would make people more comfortable with it," Hansen said. "With the lack of that, I think people are a little bit like, 'Oh, what's going to happen with it?' Kind of on edge. It's kind of frustrating."

Fifth-year senior tight end and tri-captain Riar Geer said prior to meetings Sunday that coaches had not addressed speculation about their job security with the team. He said they don't need to. Geer is one of a handful of members of the team who have been through a coaching change before. He was a true freshman when Gary Barnett was fired and Hawkins was hired in December of 2005.

"It's one of the last things we really need to be worrying about," he said. "We're really just concentrating on the season and really just restricting our focus to Oklahoma State. Concentrating on whether or not coach is going to have a job is the last thing we need to be worried about."

Geer said the problems with this season's teams are not necessarily acceptable but they are understandable because so many young players are playing. He said he also understands that is an excuse CU fans have grown tired of hearing.

"You go back to the same old excuse, but it seems pretty legit," Geer said. "We really are a young, inexperienced team at some pretty important positions. Really the only position on offense where we're really experienced at is the tight end."

"We have a lot of seniors there who have played in a lot of football games. Unfortunately, the tight end is not a huge part of the offense."

Geer and some of his teammates said if CU fans are willing to be just a little more patient with the program Hawkins is developing, he believes they will be rewarded.

"I was just talking about this with some of the other seniors the other day," he said. "I feel like it's kind of unfortunate we're graduating because I feel like next year this team could really take off and be something special."

Missed call?

Geer said he is convinced he scored a touchdown in the third quarter at Iowa State on Saturday on a 24-yard pass from Hansen in the third quarter. He said he caught the ball and was standing ever so briefly in the end zone before being hit and falling to the ground.

When he went to the ground he dropped the ball and officials told him and CU coaches that he needed to control the ball all the way through the play for it to be ruled a score. It would have made the score 17-10 and the Buffs would have tied the game later on Markques Simas' touchdown catch.

"The ref told me I had to fall all the way down to the ground with it," Geer said. "Just having my feet down in the end zone wasn't good enough."

Smart ailing

Smart didn't play much against Iowa State because of a neck injury he has been dealing with the past three weeks. Smart said he has been experiencing numbness in one of his arms because of nerve damage.

Smart said he tried to play for several series against the Cyclones but was unable to continue. He said he believes he will be able to play again this season but he isn't sure whether it will be this week with a short turnaround before Thursday's game at Oklahoma State.

Short week

The Buffs schedule is a challenge this week. They held meetings late Sunday evening and conducted the weekly correct and review session at 9 p.m. Hawkins will have his weekly press conference today instead of Tuesday and the Buffs will practice tonight at 8 p.m., and again Tuesday before leaving for Stillwater, Okla., on Wednesday.

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Future cloudy for Colorado

Speculation spiraling as Buffs start short week

By Patrick Ridgell
 © 2009 Longmont Times-Call

AMES, Iowa — Colorado coach Dan Hawkins was asked Saturday about the quick turn-around his Buffaloes face in playing Thursday at No. 12 Oklahoma State (5:45 p.m., ESPN).

As if that's their biggest problem.

In what figures to be another interesting week, the Buffs will convene today for meetings and practice, and Hawkins will hold his weekly news conference, while speculation over his future with the program builds.

CU's 17-10 loss Saturday at Iowa State assured the Buffs of their fourth losing season in a row, no bowl, no Big 12 North title, and a turbulent end to the season.

Athletic director Mike Bohn declined to comment on the program's future following Saturday's defeat.

Hawkins said he was not worried about the focus his team will have this week when all that's left to play for, according to several Buffs, is pride. Players and coaches said last week that everything within the program remains fine and stable despite what's going on around it. The ruckus that'll come this week, though, might be hard to ignore.

Hawkins said he harbors no worries over his team's focus.

"Our guys will go," Hawkins said.

"We have another big game this week and another great opportunity to show what we're about. They're fighters."

Bohn said Sept. 15 his department was "under attack" from fans upset over losing the season's first two games. E-mails and phone calls to the Times-Call, plus opinions written on Internet message boards, indicate fans have grown angrier since.

An issue facing the department now is the challenge that keeping Hawkins would pose to selling tickets and raising funds in 2010. Asked about that issue on Nov. 5, Bohn said, "The program is not more important than any one individual."



Colorado's Tyler Hansen is sacked by Iowa State's Patrick Neal during the second quarter of their game Saturday in Ames, Iowa. CU's 17-10 loss assured the Buffs of their fourth losing season in a row — and a turbulent end to the season.

Charlie Neibergall/AP

FIRST LOOK

A quick glimpse at CU's next opponent:

Who: No. 12 Oklahoma State (8-2, 5-1)

Where: Boone Pickens Stadium, Stillwater, Okla.

When: Thursday, 5:45 p.m., ESPN

Notes: Thursday will be Oklahoma State's final home game of 2009. ... Oklahoma State was ranked No. 12 in Sunday's BCS poll. ... The Buffs have won 11 of the past 14 in the series, but the Cowboys won 30-17 last year in Boulder and have taken two of the past three. ... The Cowboys are still mathematically alive for the Big 12 South title, but Texas would have to lose its last two games. ... Running back Kendall Hunter suffered an ankle injury in mid-September that has slowed him. He missed five games before returning Oct. 31 against Texas. He rushed 17 times for 68 yards Saturday. Oklahoma State still leads the Big 12 in rushing with 200.7 yards per game.

It's unclear how appeased CU's administration could be if the Buffs (3-7, 2-4 Big 12) can defeat the Cowboys and Nebraska in their finale (Nov. 27) and finish with five wins. That's a tall order for the road-challenged Buffs.

They fell Saturday to 2-18 beyond state borders during Hawkins' tenure in regular season games. CU lost its 11th straight regular season road game.

"I think we're still game-planning and calling the plays the same," offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said. "There's something to this away thing. I'm not sure what it is, but we have to figure it out real fast." Hawkins said he and his staff learned from the Toledo game in September, before which CU had just five days to prepare. He said he and his staff have a couple of things in mind to accelerate preparation.

The short week might be a bigger burden for Oklahoma State (8-2, 5-1). Quarterback Zac Robinson, a Chatfield High graduate, took a brutal helmet-to-helmet hit late in Saturday's 24-17 defeat of Texas Tech and had to be helped off the field.

According to the Tulsa World, Oklahoma State tested Robinson for a concussion Sunday. Coach Mike Gundy said that he anticipates Robinson will play Thursday.

"His tests went very well," Gundy told the newspaper.

If Robinson can't play, the Cowboys will choose between inexperienced backups – junior Alex Cate and sophomore Brandon Weeden. They've combined to throw 15 passes in their careers.

Weeden has thrown only seven passes in 2009, all in a 56-6 defeat of Grambling State. Cate hasn't thrown one this season.

Oklahoma State is already without star receiver Dez Bryant, whose suspension for lying about a meeting with Deion Sanders was upheld by the NCAA last month. He has already declared his plans to enter the 2010 NFL Draft, where he might be the first receiver taken.

[Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog.](#) He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.