

## Bohn: CU to keep Buffs coach Dan Hawkins for stability, continuity, classroom results

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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University of Colorado officials decided to bring back football coach Dan Hawkins for a fifth season Thursday with no stipulations for changes in his coaching staff and without setting a target number of wins for next season.

But a renegotiation of his contract, which runs through Jan. 31, 2013, could be in the works with an eye toward giving the school more flexibility if the results on the field do not improve.

Citing a need for stability and continuity and the results Hawkins' players have produced in the classroom, athletic director Mike Bohn said he and Chancellor Phil DiStefano chose to give their football coach another year to show improvement in the Big 12 standings.

Hawkins' team is 3-8 and will conclude its fourth consecutive losing season today at home against rival Nebraska, which will be playing for the Big 12 championship next week in Arlington, Texas. Hawkins is 16-32 as coach of the Buffs. His tenure has been the most unsuccessful time in the program in the past 25 years.

Bohn apologized to his football coaches and his football team Thursday morning after returning from a trip to Hawaii, where he had been supporting the men's basketball team in its first appearance in the prestigious Maui Invitational tournament.

Bohn said he felt it was inappropriate that players and coaches heard through the news media about his decision to retain Hawkins before hearing it from him in person. Bohn said he and the chancellor met with Hawkins and then all three addressed the team.

"I am very proud of our young men and I'm proud of their engagement and their desire to continue to build their passion for the program that they're a part of," Bohn said.

The school issued a press release in which DiStefano referred to the decision as Bohn's.

"I want all CU fans, supporters, and members of the University community to know that I support athletic director Mike Bohn's decision to honor coach Hawkins' contract and believe this decision is in the best interests of the University of Colorado at Boulder," DiStefano said.

Later, during an interview with the Camera, Bohn explained he made the decision in concert with DiStefano. Hawkins was not available for comment.

DC: Why did you decide to retain Dan Hawkins when his track record, at least in some regards, indicates you should not?

MB: "I firmly believe that the power of stability comes from continuity and I'm convinced that the commitment from our students athletes to continue to play hard for their coach, despite a lot of public criticism has been consistently demonstrated. I believe that Dan retains the potential to be the caliber of coach on and off the field that we hired him to be, and his ability to lead this program to the heights that we all expect."

DC: Who made this decision?

MB: "Mike Bohn does not make any major decision, or for that matter any decision of significance, without the full

engagement of campus leadership. So that involves whether it's a facility project, a budget project, a personnel issue, any of those. And that process has served me very, very well in my tenure here. One of the things I've tried to do is rally a lot of constituents on campus, whether that is faculty, student leadership, central administration. Therefore that process was the same as it would be with any other issue of importance that impacts the entire campus, not just athletics. We've worked very hard to be a fabric of the institution and in no way, shape or form would I ever make a decision without continuing to build and foster that collaborative spirit and support that we receive from campus and the system office as well."

DC: In the press release you sent out, the chancellor referred to this as your decision. Is your fate now tied to Dan Hawkins?

MB: "I'm evaluated on an annual basis associated with all aspects of the athletic program, not just the status of one particular coach. However, I recognize that football is our marquee sport and maybe receives more weight than others."

DC: Did you know when you left town for the Maui Invitational that Dan Hawkins would be meeting with Phil DiStefano?

MB: "Yes. Phil and I have collaborated along with other campus leaders on this process and other major decisions on campus all along."

DC: Were you told you have to keep Dan Hawkins as your coach?

MB: "No. I engaged, as athletic director, in collaboration with first the chancellor, other leaders on campus. We have two faculty oversight committees. We have other leaders within the campus hierarchy that we engage with, and, again, those relationships and that process has served us well in the past. It served us well on this decision, and we will continue to utilize that process."

DC: Last week when we talked to you after the Oklahoma State game, you indicated that no decision would be made or announced until after the season was over. Why did you decide to make an announcement before the final game?

MB: "Because the speculation was growing to the point that it was such a distraction and I think if you look back, I have been supportive of Dan all along. It got to the point where the speculation was time for us to end that speculation so that Dan and the football team could do their business and focus on business."

DC: How much of a factor in the decision were the financial concerns of possibly firing Dan Hawkins?

MB: "Money is always a consideration in big time college football. However, it wasn't the determining factor. The bottom line was, is Dan Hawkins the right coach for CU at this time and for the institution during a complex environment? The answer is yes."

DC: Will Dan Hawkins have to make any changes to his coaching staff?

MB: "There are no stipulations associated with Dan's return. However, Dan and I will be reviewing all aspects of the program to look for opportunities for us to improve or enhance the program."

DC: Have there been or will there be any changes to Dan Hawkins' contract with the university in relation to this decision?

MB: "We have no announcement or movement related to that at this time."

DC: Is that a possibility in the near future?

MB: "I think it's inappropriate to speculate on that."

DC: Did Dan Hawkins make any promises or concessions in terms of your discussion about bringing him back for a fifth year?

MB: "No, but as I said in the release, we continue to have constructive and candid discussions regarding all aspects of the football enterprise."

DC: There are at least some fans out there already saying that the school's and the athletic department's expectations for the football program are too low, and this decision proves that. What do you say to them?

MB: "Our competitive resolve has never been stronger. And as Phil said in his statement, making a change at this particular time, we believe, takes us further away from our goal than closer to it. But our competitive resolve and our passion and our desire to build a program all of our fans can be proud of is at the highest level."

DC: What do you say to those fans who are either saying that they will not renew their season tickets, club seats or suites or they are considering not renewing?

MB: "I recognize that we have a schism associated with our fan base, but the program, whether it's any program across the country that is going through similar challenges, is bigger than any coach, administrator or leader on campus and collectively our program will improve faster for the long haul when all of our constituents are helping us grow in the same direction. That's the norm across the country with programs that are in similar situations that we are, and I anticipate that our fans will continue to be the heartbeat that makes a difference just like they did against Kansas and against Texas A&M. It's about the program. It's about the institution as a whole. The program is bigger than any of us."

DC: What are the expectations for next year considering you will be facing a more difficult schedule than what you faced this year?

MB: "Being a contender in the Big 12 is definitely on the list, along with an favorable APR. A continued commitment to the community that has so much invested in our program. I will not put a number on wins and losses because we all know that other variables at different times enter into those decisions."

DC: If you are not willing to say that at least a winning record or bowl appearance is the minimum expectation, doesn't that indicate that those fans out there saying that the department and the school's expectations are too low are right?

MB: "I said being a contender in the Big 12. What does that mean to you? That starts with our division, right?"

DC: What sort of feedback and response have you received on the positive side of this decision?

MB: "The feedback is varied obviously, but there is a tremendous amount of positive feedback as well. People recognize that the program is something they're passionate about and they want to see us improve. That's why we're asking our fan base to help us collectively to pull together to support the program. When all of our fans are on the same page and making a difference for us, good things happen. Case in point, the Kansas game. A rabid environment, positive feedback, enthusiastic support of the defense. All those things."



# Seven Buffs likely in line for Heart Award

## Defensive player has won award last 3 years

**By Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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Each autumn when November arrives, Pat Grimes finds himself treating every spot in which he finds more than one Colorado football fan as a polling place.

He attends booster events in Denver and Boulder, stops by tailgates on campus on game days and visits with students. He even puts in a call or two to program insiders and hands out ballots in section 119 at Folsom Field. All of these efforts are geared toward deciding the winner of the Buffalo Heart Award.

Grimes and two of his friends founded the award in 1998 as a way to honor one player on each year's team that exemplifies heart, grit, determination and desire on and off the field throughout the season. Grimes said the award is not limited to seniors but it has always gone to one in the past.

It is officially presented to the winner by the fans behind the home team bench following the conclusion of the final home game each season. Every other year that means a player receives it after winning or losing to rival Nebraska, as will be the case Friday when the Buffs welcome the Cornhuskers to Boulder.

"It's very different because the Nebraska games mean so much to the players," Grimes said. "So after the games, the players reactions tend to reflect that."

Grimes said he remembers presenting the award to former CU quarterback Mike Moschetti in 1999, the second year of the award, after the Buffs had lost a heartbreaker 33-30 in overtime against Big Red.

"When he received the award, he was pretty beat up," Grimes said. "He was very appreciate, but you could tell he hurt so much."

On the flip side, receiving the Buffalo Heart Award has been an extra ounce of joy for the only two players ever to receive it on the same day as a win over Nebraska.

Cortlen Johnson was the leading vote getter in 2001 following the memorable 62-36 win and Jordon Dizon won in 2007 after the Buffs beat the Cornhuskers 65-51.

The award is handcrafted by one of the original founders, Craig Augustin. It consists of a picture of the player inside on a frame on a plaque with an inscription describing the purpose and nature of the honor. It costs about \$17 to make each year and falls within acceptable standards in the NCAA rules.

"The players have no idea why they are being asked after the handshakes on the field to come back to the east stands on the 50 yard line," Grimes said. "When they see me or others holding the plaque they almost seem like they are in shock. When I read the award their reactions are great. You can see how appreciative they are. Some have been pretty emotional and you can see tears in their eyes."

The football program first treated the award with skepticism when it was founded not knowing if it would stand the test of time and if the fans would continue to tradition every year. As the years have passed, it has been fully embraced. The school posts the winner on the video screens in the stadium after the game.

There are no shortage of candidates for the award this season.

Defensive back Ben Burney has endured five surgeries in his time at CU and returned to be one of the crucial elements of a solid defense this season.

Linebacker Marcus Burton overcame personal challenges in his life earlier in his career to become a team captain this season. He is one of the most mature players on the team as a married father of two.

Cornerback Cha`pelle Brown was doubted because of his size as a true freshman when he joined the program in 2006. He has been a mainstay through all four years and will play in his 46th game as a Buff on Friday.

Tight end Riar Geer is another player who overcame troubles off the field earlier in his career as well as injuries to be one of the key components on offense this season.

Fellow tight end Patrick Devenny came to Colorado as a quarterback in 2005 and changed positions. He fought through growing pains and a lack of confidence to earn rewards this season, such as catching the game-winning touchdown pass against Texas A&M earlier this month.

Linebacker Jeff Smart was a walk-on when he arrived at CU from just down the street in 2005. He attended Boulder High School and used tenacity and force of will to become the Buffs leading tackler for the past two seasons and a team captain this season.

Safety Ryan Walters won the award last season. He was the fifth defensive player (third consecutive) to win the award. In the first 11 years of the award, two quarterbacks, two wide receivers, two tailbacks, two linebackers and two safeties have earned the honor along with one defensive tackle.

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## Woelk: Give Hawkins a fifth year

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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Over the last couple of weeks, I've been asked time and again whether I thought Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins would be fired.

Each time, I answered in the affirmative. The evidence at hand, beginning with a four-year span in which he's lost twice as many games as he's won, strongly suggested a change. That's simply how college sports work these days: very little patience and a tendency to make a change for change's sake.

But there's a difference between "will he be fired" and "should he be fired."

To the latter, I would say "no." As the speculation surrounding Hawkins' future has mounted, I've held out hope that athletic director Mike Bohn and chancellor Phil DiStefano will buck conventional wisdom, do the right thing and give Hawkins a fifth year.

It looks like that will be the case.

It's easy to say Hawkins should be fired. But if I were the CU athletic director, I'd announce my decision today with this plan:

First, make it clear that DiStefano is 100 percent on board with the decision. Given that DiStefano likes Hawkins -- in particular his emphasis on academics, community service and social conduct -- that should be easy.

Then I'd say I've asked the chancellor to take these steps:

One, make it apparent to everyone that the decision to bring Hawkins back was a mutual one, made in the best interest of the team, the department and the university.

Make a commitment to give Hawkins every chance to succeed.

Such a commitment must begin with admissions. CU is in the huge minority in Division I athletics when it comes to granting exceptions in terms of academic requirements. Even such academic stalwarts as Cal and Stanford grant such exceptions. If DiStefano wants Hawkins to succeed on the field, he must be willing to make that field level wherever possible.

Such a decision would also be a major step toward CU's always-present goal of increasing diversity on campus. Allow Hawkins -- and CU's other coaches -- to widen the scope of their recruiting, and it will increase the number of CU students who come from varied and diverse backgrounds.

Simply, back up your words with actions.

Provide financial assurance. What is clear is that a decision to bring Hawkins back will not boost ticket sales. Rather, CU can expect at least a minor drop in season ticket sales, luxury suite renewals and perhaps even marketing support. The athletic department must be assured that university financial support will be available when those economic realities hit.

Then, I'd have a sit-down with Hawkins.

I'd tell him I admire what he has done in terms of establishing a culture that stresses accountability and responsibility. I have great respect for his insistence that his players give back by completing community service projects. And, his emphasis on academics is something that every coach in the nation should be required to emulate.

Players are, after all, "student athletes." Requiring them to complete both ends of the bargain is not unreasonable.

Then, I'd make it clear that a handful of victories can no longer be acceptable. The pure economics of the situation will require a show of improvement next year. Consistency on the field must be as evident as in other areas of the program. Ultimately, the program will be judged by wins and losses -- and the evidence thus far has not been good.

How to change that part?

Staff overhaul. Einstein is famously quoted as saying that doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. Hawkins' staff has remained far too static, with the results being predictable. He must make significant changes -- not just cosmetic touch-ups here and there.

As an example, I'd point back to the 1984-85 CU teams.

When then-A.D. Bill Marolt gave Bill McCartney a contract extension in the midst of a 1-10 season in 1984, he did it on the condition that Mac make staff changes, and the coach agreed.

The following season, McCartney brought Mike Hankwitz, Steve Bernstein, Steve Logan and Oliver Lucas on staff. All were outstanding recruiters. But Logan also had a role that has been greatly underappreciated by CU fans over the years. When McCartney made the decision to switch from a passing team to a wishbone team for the 1985 season, he brought in Logan to help install the offense.

The change was dramatic. CU went from a 1-10 program to a bowl team in one season.

Hawkins must be willing to consider equally dramatic changes in his staff make-up and team philosophy.

Then, I'd make it clear to Hawkins that there will be no talk -- public or private -- about any kind of contract extension. Coaches love to use recruiting as a wedge for contract talks. There will be no such wedge next season. Hawk must make his team's performance his primary recruiting tool.

And finally, in return, here's what I would promise Hawkins:

More money for his assistants when he goes out to hire new coaches. Salaries for CU assistants have long been a problem. Some of the money that would have been spent to make a coaching change will instead go toward making significant improvements in the salaries for assistants. The message would be "Go get the best assistants you can find. We'll pay them."

A continuing effort to improve facilities -- in return for the coach's vow never to publicly or privately bemoan where CU stands in that regard. While CU's facilities do not measure up to those at many other Big 12 schools, Hawkins must trust that CU is doing its best to improve in that area. If he wants to stay, he must remain positive-- again, publicly and privately -- in that regard.

The coach's duties as a public "spokesman" for the program will be reduced. While it's great to have your coach at booster meetings, service club luncheons and state tours, it still takes away from his primary duties. Give him more time to spend on football -- and expect results.

Yes, I'd keep Dan Hawkins. I'd buck conventional wisdom and address some of the inherent problems within the program and university.

Changing coaches won't fix those problems.

But fixing those problems might prevent you from having to make a change.

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# CU president: 'We're going to stay the course' with Dan Hawkins

## Benson, chancellor back Hawkins; fans split on decision

By Vanessa Miller, Camera staff writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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The wins will come.

In the meantime, top University of Colorado leaders said they are proud of the elite students that its head football coach recruits to play in black and gold.

Shortly after CU Athletic Director Mike Bohn confirmed on Thursday that Dan Hawkins will continue to coach the Buffaloes for a fifth season, CU President Bruce Benson praised the decision, saying it's "exactly the right thing for the university."

"I think he's doing the right things, and we're proud of him, and we're going to stay the course," Benson said, noting Hawkins' recruiting standards. "We really want high-quality kids, and it will come. It's going to take a little while, but I'm a big supporter."

Fans have criticized Hawkins this season for mounting losses in what was supposed to be a turnaround year. The Buffs are 3-8 heading into Friday's rivalry game with Nebraska, and the team is 16-32 in four seasons under Hawkins.

Although CU's record this season might not show Hawkins' success, Benson said, his players' academic performance does.

"The GPA on the team was the highest it's been in many, many years, and the kids aren't getting into trouble," he said. "We used to have a lot of that."

"We had a structural problem — we were bringing in kids we shouldn't have been bringing in — and all it takes it one bad apple and then you have a scandal," Benson said. "I don't like scandals."

Benson wouldn't speculate beyond next season to say whether Hawkins would keep his job through the end of his extended contract if CU continues to lose.

"I'm on a day-to-day contract myself, and I'm under scrutiny," he said. "We go day-by-day and see how things are going."

Last year, CU extended Hawkins' contract through the 2012 season. Had Bohn decided to fire Hawkins after this season, it would have cost the university more than \$3 million.

CU Chancellor Phil DiStefano said money had some bearing in the university's decision to keep Hawkins at the helm.

"I think it was part of the equation," DiStefano said on Thursday. "You have to consider the cost of buying out a coach. But that wasn't a major factor."

What was, DiStefano said, was Hawkins' ability to handle his student-athletes.

"This year, he had 19 football players who were on the academic all-American team in the Big 12," he said. "He has a low tolerance for student athletes who get into trouble, and when you take everything together, I think it was a good decision to keep him."

DiStefano said he's hopeful that Hawkins' success with his young players off the field soon will translate to success on the field.

"Everyone is disappointed in the wins and losses, but I think those wins will come along as well," he said Thursday. "Next year — hopefully starting with tomorrow — they will come."

CU graduate Chris Venne, 34, said he's not so sure and thinks the squad's lackluster season points to the need for a change.

"Dan Hawkins is clearly a bust," he said, conceding that \$3 million is a lot to pay to dismiss a coach. "Sometimes you have to ride it out and send him packing."



Long-time Boulder resident and consummate CU fan William Brodie, 62, disagreed and said Hawkins' character and student standards are enough to keep him here for now.

"I've followed a lot of coaches, and I think they should give a guy like him at least one more year," Brodie said. "I know it comes down to if a coach doesn't win, the rich alumni want to get rid of him, but it shouldn't be like that."

CU senior Stephen Pavone, 21, said aside from Hawkins' "bizarre" news conferences, he supports giving him one more year.

"I've been disappointed because the team has seemed heartless at games, but I don't know if it's the coach," Pavone said.

The CU student's father, Chris Pavone, said he agrees and thinks it takes time to get rolling with a new system.

"I hate to see (coaches) get turned over that often," he said.



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## Hawkins will lead CU against Nebraska, and into 2010

By [Kyle Clark](#) on November 25, 2009 · [Comment](#) · [Email This](#) · [ShareThis](#)



Prior to closing practices and media access, as traditionally done before the Nebraska game, Colorado Coach Dan Hawkins spoke Monday. He appeared somber, even remorseful at times, citing his decisions in the past, including that of recruiting son Cody as quarterback. All signs pointed to Hawk Love ending with the season after Friday's game.

That all changed Wednesday, starting with a flurry of back-and-forth admissions and denials regarding the coach's future. In the morning, CBS4 reported that Hawkins had told staff he would be back after meeting with CU. Then mid-day, an official denial came from CU officials, stating that while there was a meeting with Chancellor Phil DiStefano, any decision would have to come from AD Mike Bohn.

Bohn apparently heard the rumor mill churning. A few hours later, 850AM KOA's Sports Director Mark Johnson, who is on the road with Bohn for the Maui Invitational, reported that an announcement of Hawkins' return through 2010 will be coming on Thursday afternoon.

With a decision made, it makes sense to publicly announce the intention, as unfavorable as it may be with some fans. The Buffaloes can work on achieving the pinhole narrow focus necessary to beat their rival, and have another emotional hook to hang their hats on. The Buffs aren't playing to save a job anymore, they're playing to prove a point.

Some Nebraska fans may not admit it, but aside from a bowl, this is the biggest game of the year for their team as well. Win or lose Friday, the Huskers will play against Texas for the Big 12 championship in Dallas. Judging by the 3,000 plus allotment of Nebraska's tickets remaining unsold, there doesn't seem to be a high level of confidence for their chances.

So in a way, tonight's news is a very good thing for Colorado. It puts everything back where it should be: Beat Big Red. Emotional tanks topped off, here are three keys to winning on the field:

## **LOOSEN UP**

All the discussion before last week's game against Oklahoma State was about penalties. Assistants even dressed up in stripes and threw flags during practices. And what did CU do? They had their worst day in penalty yardage yet.

Many of those came from personal foul calls, late hits and leading with helmets. The Buffs were trying to play tough against OSU, but some of it felt more like blind rage than calculated aggression. Hope the coaches can instill more of the fun that comes with playing hard, and playing clean.

## **PLAY AT THE SPEED OF SUH**

Colorado will have to face the best defensive player they've seen all season, the best in the Big 12 and some argue the best defensive tackle in college football. Senior Ndamukong Suh has been so dominant, he's even being mentioned as a possible vote-getter for the Heisman award.

If Tyler Hansen thought the games against Missouri and Texas A&M were tough, where he was sacked 16 total times, just wait for what Suh can do. CU needs more of the designed QB runs that seem to be working better each week to keep the defenseman off the pass rush all the time. When Suh does make it past the line, Hansen needs to get the ball out quickly, something he's been working on improving.

## **MAKE HELU HOLD ON**

Nebraska's top rusher, Roy Helu Jr., is a consistent threat to run for over 100 yards a game. Containing him is key to putting a Huskers offense, that at times has been looking for more balance. In two of the three Nebraska losses, Helu was held to under 50 yards in each.

The junior back also has had previous struggles with fumbles. His two against Iowa State took both him and the offense out of the game, resulting in a 9-7 final. Shaking up Helu early may force Nebraska away from their game plan, opening up more turnover chances for the Buffs.

*Editor's note: Comments have been turned off on football stories involving CU to meet the university's requirement for giving media credentials to Web site reporters and photographers.*

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## It's been a long, dark trip for CU seniors

*By Justin Williams*  
© 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Benjamin Burney has been through some of the darkest times the University of Colorado has seen.

The infamous recruiting scandal. The 2-10 season. Ten wins, no excuses.

And the fact that he survived might go down as the biggest accomplishment of his Colorado football career.

"It was basically five years of straight trials and tribulations to make you a man," said Burney, a CU safety. "It's put you in the fire, and there's been some tough, tough fire.

"For you to stick through all hardships, it shows what kind of person you are."

Only 17 seniors, Burney among them, remain on the Buffs' roster after the turbulent ride through their football careers, and they'll play in their final game as a Buffalo on Friday when rival Nebraska (8-3, 5-2 Big 12) rolls into town.

Junior Austin Bisnow will be recognized Friday, as well, because he is graduating and won't return to the team.

Though tough at times, this class has seen some high points — beating Oklahoma and Nebraska in 2007 and then a ranked West Virginia team on national TV a year ago — rank high on that list. But those highlight moments have been few and far between.

This season, with the Buffs at 3-8, has seen even fewer of those moments, and coach Dan Hawkins finds himself on the hot seat — perceptively, at least — for it.

"As far as Hawk's tenure here, I think we've laid a foundation down for the long term," said senior Taj Kaynor, who admitted some "unexpected things" contributed to his own struggles on the field this season, but didn't elaborate on them. "This year hasn't gone the way we wanted it, but every week, Hawk was like 'We're this close,' and I think that's why the team didn't get down on ourselves throughout the year.

"You could see it on film. We felt like we were that close."

As much as the fans struggle with the concept, one of Hawkins' key points during his tenure has been how it's not all about success on the field, and the CU players seem to have bought into that.

Take the three senior captains' stories, for instance.

Marcus Burton, Jeff Smart and Riar Geer are all perfect examples of players that have seen the bottom and came out better men for it. Burton was academically ineligible one season. Geer was arrested in 2008. Jeff Smart, a Boulder native, walked on to the program as a freshman.

The players, particularly the seniors, don't view 2009 as a complete failure.

"This team is the closest I've ever been on in all the years," Burney said. "We love each other — from the receivers, to the O-line, to the kickers. We all hang out and kick it together.

"This really is a family, and this season really has been special."

But let's face it. A win against Nebraska will make all that postgame lovey-dovey stuff feel that much better.

"Everybody talks about how this game is for the seniors," Cha'pelle Brown said. "But it's not. It's about everybody. It's about getting this program back on the right track and ending on a positive note heading into next season."

Burney said he's let himself sit back reflect on his time in Boulder a lot in the past few weeks. He finds himself hanging out in the locker room and in the weight room a bit longer, just trying to soak in every last moment of his collegiate career.

Just as Friday, he said, he'll "relish every sweat drop."

"I might shed a few tears out there on Friday," he said. "It's been a long trip. It's been a hard trip, but I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world."

Patrick Ridgell contributed to this report.

Justin Williams can be reached at [jwilliams@times-call.com](mailto:jwilliams@times-call.com).

Two weeks ago, the Huskers met a desperate Kansas team, trying to avoid a five-game losing streak. Last week, it was Kansas State that needed a win to keep its season alive.

Now, the Buffaloes are playing in their final game of the season. And it's likely that they won't hold anything back as they try to move the ball against the stingy Blackshirts.

So Pelini and the NU coaches have spent the week trying to prepare their players, though they'll undoubtedly see something new during the game, according to the second-year coach.

The defenders just have to keep communicating to avoid big plays.

“We’ve been dealing with that for a couple weeks now — a lot of teams, trying to throw things at us,” Pelini said. “The key is not to get flustered. That’s why you have rules, that’s why you have concepts.”

## **Starting duo to return for Colorado game**

Two Nebraska starters who missed most or all of last weekend's game against Kansas State should be back Friday, Pelini said.

Sophomore right tackle Marcel Jones injured his right ankle on the third offensive play of the game and never returned. But Pelini said Jones did “look pretty good” during Wednesday's practice.

Sophomore cornerback Alfonzo Dennard also missed Saturday's game after suffering a toe injury during practice last week. Dennard also has been battling a sore shoulder, but he should play against Colorado, Pelini said.

## **Pelini wants to see QB tuck the ball away**

Pelini would like to see junior quarterback Zac Lee keep the football and run it himself if Colorado defends Nebraska's option play the same way opposing defenses have been recently.

Defenders have been forcing the play to the sidelines, Pelini said. So, often making the pitch is not the right move.

“They’ve been stringing it out a bit lately and that’s when he’s got to learn to tuck the football,” Pelini said.

But the more in-game opportunities Lee has, the more comfortable he’ll be at making the correct instinctive decision, Pelini said.

“It’s just a matter of getting him reps,” Pelini said. “He’s starting to understand what to do, when to and not to. I think he’s done a good job with it.”

## **Hawkins' status could motivate foe**

The uncertain future of Dan Hawkins has been a distraction in Boulder, Colo., all year, so it's a likely possibility that the turmoil — not the on-field performances by the Buffaloes and Huskers — could be the postgame topic Friday.

But Pelini's keeping himself separated from the controversy.

Asked if the situation could be a motivator for Colorado's team, Pelini said he was expecting a tough matchup anyway.

“They have pride and they're going to play hard,” he said. “I know the kids are going to want to play hard for (Hawkins) regardless of what the situation is.”

— **Jon Nyatawa**

• NU coach Bo Pelini after Wednesday's practice: