

Mizzou still boasts weapons on offense

Senior WR Alexander picks up where Coffman left off

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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The film is a little easier to look at this season as coaches and players on the Colorado football team study their opponent this week, particularly for the Buffs on defense.

In the past eight quarters the CU team has spent on the field with Missouri, the Tigers have scored 113 points. Many of the Missouri players who had the scoreboard spinning like a slot machine the past two years have moved on to the National Football League, including Chase Daniel, Jeremy Maclin and Chase Coffman, all of whom did their share of the damage.

While there isn't as much wincing and worry in preparation for this group of Tigers, there is still plenty of cause for concern.

"Everybody thinks, 'Oh wait until these guys are gone.' But guess what? They've got more guys who are very similar," CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

Missouri coach Gary Pinkel loved Daniel like a son and raved about Maclin being the best player he has coached in his 32 years of experience. But the former Tiger CU defenders are most pleased not to see this Saturday is Coffman.

His size and athleticism were a brutal combination for the Buffs, but they will still see that combination of stature and ability this week -- just in a different jersey number.

Danario Alexander isn't a tight end like Coffman, but he looks like one at times. He has formed one of the most dangerous pitch-and-catch duos in the country with first-year starting quarterback Blaine Gabbert, who has been battling an ankle injury during the Tigers' three-game losing streak.

Alexander, a 6-foot-5, 215-pound senior has been just the sort of big, reliable target every young quarterback likes to have running routes. He is the third-leading receiver in the Big 12 Conference and the ninth-leading pass catcher in the nation.

"He's an aggressive receiver," CU cornerback Jimmy Smith said. "He goes up and gets the ball. Decent routes, he's not a blazer but he's got some speed. He's long-legged so he can outrun you very easily."

Alexander won't be the only Tiger the Buffs have to stop Saturday at Folsom Field (11:40 a.m., FSN) but he's right at the top of the list. When the Missouri offense is moving the ball, scoring points and feeling good about itself, Alexander is typically heavily involved.

He has battled back from several injuries earlier in his career that kept him from being as big a part of the past two Big 12 North Division championship teams as he would have liked, but he is making up for it in his final season before he also gets a shot at the pro level.

"I said all along that he's a guy that had he been healthy his entire career he would probably be a top-10 receiver in the country, but we never got to see that," Pinkel said last week. "I'm glad he's healthy, he obviously helps us. And people have no idea how much time he has spent in that training room rehabbing. He gets hit in the mouth and gets right back up and he keeps going. Talk about persistence, he's a visual aid for it.

"He is very athletic, a long strider but he has great acceleration, and he can go up and has great range. He's got range like Chase Coffman probably even more because he can jump higher. He's got a 40-inch vertical jump, and that applies to him playing receiver, too. He has tremendous big play potential."

Missouri uses Alexander all over the field, but Pinkel likes to put his best receiver in the slot creating awkward match-ups with linebackers and safeties. CU safeties Ben Burney and Ray Polk will probably spend a big chunk of their Saturday with at least one eye on Alexander even on plays when he is not their particular assignment.

Perhaps Burney and Alexander can get acquainted Saturday and compare scars. The two seniors have combined to overcome nine

surgeries to return and play their senior seasons. Alexander has had four procedures and Burney had five, all in the past year.

Colorado already has faced some of the nation's best receivers this fall in Jordan Shipley at Texas and Dezmon Briscoe and Kerry Meier at Kansas. So facing Alexander and the rest of the Tigers won't be a shock to the system, but it definitely presents a challenge.

"They have some play-makers, but I think we have some play-makers on defense to make it a good game," Smith said.

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cu football

CU athletic director Bohn glad to see Hawkins "get back to who he is"

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — After getting a chance to watch Internet video of Dan Hawkins' introspective, 25-minute soliloquy that opened his Tuesday media luncheon, Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said Wednesday that he was pleased to see the football coach open up.

"Dan is so competitive, and wants so badly to deliver a program that everybody can be excited about, he has recently been a little more guarded and a little short in his engagement with many of the outlets that provide insights into our program," Bohn said.

Bohn said he did not instruct Hawkins to be more personable this week. But the athletic director acknowledged that he has been "urging

Dan to present the challenge he faces in a more concise, more transparent and more honest way."

"I believe he realizes he has to take advantage of those (public) opportunities — to play 'offense' a little bit instead of giving a sense of defensiveness," Bohn explained. "That defensiveness had left an impression that was less than favorable to him. That wasn't Dan.

"It was great to hear him admit that he is not infallible and is committed to building this program for the long haul. It was great to see him get back to who he is. He realizes he has misstepped at times, and also maybe come across in a different way than what is really himself. I was pleased to see him demonstrate his full commitment to being open to change and also being more of himself."

Crisp and productive. Colorado uses Tuesdays for much of its full-pads work, and players said this week's Tuesday was one of the best practices of the season — despite the team coming off a disheartening 20-6 loss at Kansas State.

"It was the best practice we've ever had, by far," junior wideout Scotty McKnight said. "That's going to help us to play with confidence Saturday against Missouri."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
tkensler@denverpost.com

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Despite shuffling, coach says Buffs O-line excelling

By Patrick Ridgell

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BOULDER — It's interesting to note that Colorado's offensive line coach, Denver Johnson, expects to start the same five Saturday against Missouri as the Buffs did last week. In 2009, this is a rarity.

In seven games, the Buffs have started five combinations up front. Despite the regular changes and the strange things happening to it, the offensive line made "huge strides" two weeks ago against Kansas, according to coach Dan Hawkins. And Johnson said its work against Kansas State last week was its best of 2009.

"I think for the last several weeks, we've been making strides," Johnson said. "Unfortunately, it was in a losing effort. But I felt like we were assignment correct and fundamentally sound for the most part. We weren't perfect by any means, but I really think it was probably our best performance."

"The trick is to not take one step forward and two steps back. We've got too much left in front of us to back up now."

Saturday's starters are listed as Keenan Stevens at center, Ethan Adkins and Matt Bahr at left and right guard, and Nate Solder and Ryan Miller at left and right tackle. Stevens, Bahr and Miller recorded their highest grades of the year against Kansas State. Johnson said Stevens retaining the starting center job over Mike Iltis at this point is due to Stevens' performance and the concussion Iltis suffered last month.

Johnson also said Iltis had sudden problems snapping the ball in practice last week, which made Johnson uneasy.

"Quite candidly, Mike was having a little bit of trouble with his snaps, and we didn't want to risk a bad shotgun snap," Johnson said.

"It was kind of like a golfer when his swing goes bad or a pitcher can't find the strike zone. All of a sudden, last week his shotgun snaps got really erratic. That's very unlike him."

"You go through the whole week where you're having those, and you're a little reluctant to put him in the game."

Johnson said Iltis and Stevens are interchangeable players whom CU still may rotate. Game grades could be the determining factor.

Johnson said Bryce Givens, CU's starting right tackle in four games, is practicing after missing the past two games due to "personal reasons."

Johnson said CU wants to bring Givens back slowly, allowing to him to regain weight he has lost. CU lists Givens as Miller's backup at right tackle this week.

Bahr will make his second straight start at right guard, a position at which Blake Behrens has started twice and Miller four times.

Johnson said the shuffling at the position has not been a problem.



Colorado's Rodney Stewart, right, celebrates with Keenan Stevens after Stewart's touchdown against Kansas State on Saturday in Manhattan, Kan. **Joshua**

Buck/Times-Call

“You just want consistent play,” Johnson said. “Matt Bahr is a guy that has played in games and he played pretty well against Kansas State. So we feel like with those guys up there right now, we’re still trying to create competition. If we ever get everybody back and healthy and squared away at the same time, we can continue to do that.”

CU reported earlier this season that guard Max Tuioti-Mariner (torn ACLs) could return by the start of conference play. Johnson said Tuioti-Mariner is working with the scout offense and getting physically ready to compete.

He has yet to play in 2009 and could still redshirt. He’s listed third string at right guard this week.

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



Posted on Wed, Oct. 28, 2009

Mizzou faces a Colorado team in disarray

By MIKE DeARMOND
The Kansas City Star

Embattled Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins sounds like a man desperately wanting for someone, anyone, to agree that he knows what he is doing.

In video from his Tuesday news conference and — according to reports in the Boulder Daily Camera — Hawkins has come down from high expectations that Colorado could win 10 games this season. The Buffaloes' 2-5 start to this season seemingly has brought Hawkins down to earth.

If not to his knees. That's a bad place to be with Missouri, which has beaten Colorado badly in each of the last two seasons, coming to Boulder on Saturday looking for its first Big 12 win.

"In my deepest darkest moments, there is no question it's hard; it's a hard deal," Hawkins said. "I'm probably as hard on myself as anybody.

"But that being said, I do think we continue to work through it. Has it taken longer than we expected? Yeah, I'm not going to lie to you. It probably has. Have we made some mistakes along the way? Yep. I've made mistakes for 27 years."

The Boulder Daily Camera quoted Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn as saying:

"I know he recognizes he has room for improvement, room for adjustment, room for change. It's been refreshing to watch him over the last several weeks embrace that."

Hawkins' handling of quarterbacks Tyler Hansen and Cody Hawkins, the coach's son, has caused bafflement to disgust. Former Colorado quarterback Joel Klatt and former MU quarterback Corby Jones were particularly critical on Fox Sports' Big 12 wrap-up show last weekend.

Hansen, who took off his redshirt in week six and led Colorado to a 34-30 upset of Kansas, was replaced (twice) by Cody Hawkins in Colorado's 20-6 loss at Kansas State last Saturday.

On Tuesday, Hawkins used Hansen as a prop, in the midst of Hawkins' media session which Hansen attended, asking Hansen, "Have I been up front with you from the get go?"

Of course, Hansen nodded yes.

"To the fans that are frustrated," Hawkins said in his news conference, "I would just say this guys: There is no conspiracy. There's no underhandedness.

"There's no subplot. There's not another shooter on the hill."

On the field, the Buffaloes under Hawkins have been struggling to do much of anything right.

Colorado is last in the Big 12 in scoring and total offense, passing efficiency and pass efficiency defense, and punt return average, and punting.

Colorado is 11th in the league in scoring defense, rushing offense and giving up sacks.

It supports Hawkins' yin and yank philosophy of playing quarterbacks the last two games that both Hansen and Cody Hawkins have been sacked 10 times.

Hawkins said Hansen is his quarterback this week, even in the 2-minute drill where Cody Hawkins was used last week.

The litany of struggles goes on and on and on in Dan Hawkins' fourth year as the Colorado coach.

But perhaps help is on the way. This isn't the Missouri offense that blasted Colorado by a combined score of 113-10 the last two meetings.

Missouri — in consecutive losses to Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Texas — has been outscored 101-36.

To reach Mike DeArmond, call 816-234-4353 or send e-mail to mdearmond@kcstar.com

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Controlled chaos in North

Muddled division has K-State, ISU. dreaming of title.

By [Dave Matter](#)

[Wednesday, October 28, 2009](#)



Nati Harnik/AP

Iowa State Coach Paul Rhoads roars after his Cyclones upset Nebraska 9-7 Saturday in Lincoln, Neb. With a 2-2 Big 12 mark, Iowa State is in the thick of a confusing North Division race.

There's a clip on YouTube of Iowa State's locker room scene after its 9-7 upset of Nebraska on Saturday. In the climactic moment of the euphoric footage, first-year ISU Coach Paul Rhoads steps into a scrum of players, rattles his vocal chords and bares his soul.

Up for Grabs

The Big 12 North Division has the makings of a six-team race as those expected to reside in the cellar have emerged as the early leaders, while the preseason favorites have struggled of late. Here are the division standings along with the remaining games for each team.

Kansas State	5-3, 3-1	at Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, at Nebraska
Iowa State	5-3, 2-2	at Texas A&M, Oklahoma State, Colorado, at Missouri
Kansas	5-2, 1-2	at Texas Tech, at Kansas State, Nebraska, at Texas, Missouri*
Nebraska	4-3, 1-2	at Baylor, Oklahoma, at Kansas, Kansas State, at Colorado
Colorado	2-5, 1-2	Missouri, Texas A&M, at Iowa State, at Oklahoma State, Nebraska
Missouri	4-3, 0-3	at Colorado, Baylor, at Kansas State, Iowa State, Kansas*

*in Kansas City

“We got people tired everywhere,” he tells the room, his voice quivering. “We got people sore everywhere. I could not be prouder. I am so proud ... LISTEN TO ME! ... I am so proud TO BE YOUR FOOTBALL COACH!”

And with that, the Cyclones swarm Rhoads and explode into the school fight song.

The scene was compelling for its unbridled emotion, something you rarely see in today’s buttoned-up culture of major college coaching. But it also captured something else: The topsy-turvy nature of Big 12 North Division.

As the conference season reaches its midway point, this much we know about the North: We knew nothing.

At the top of the standings are the two teams with new head coaches who were expected to inherit major rebuilding projects. Kansas State is off to a 5-3 start and 3-1 league mark under Bill Snyder, back after a three-year retirement from coaching. Rhoads’ Cyclones (5-3, 2-2) have already matched their two-year overall and conference win totals under their previous coach, Gene Chizik.

Meanwhile, preseason division favorites Kansas (5-2, 1-2) and Nebraska (4-3, 1-2) have been humbled with two-game losing streaks and promptly evicted from the national rankings.

And finally, at the bottom of the division, are two desperate teams, Colorado (2-5, 1-2) and Missouri (4-3, 0-3), slated to meet Saturday in Boulder, Colo. Even with a loss, the Tigers’ division title hopes would still have a pulse, albeit a faint one. A 4-0 sweep through Baylor, Kansas State, Iowa State and Kansas could land Missouri the North crown with a tiebreaker — a scenario that probably says more about the division’s impotency than its balance of power.

Only three times has a Big 12 team reached the conference championship game after winning fewer than six Big 12 games. Each time, it happened in the North: 2004 Colorado (4-4), 2005 Colorado (5-3) and 2008 Missouri (5-3). However, those three were clobbered in the championship game by an aggregate score of 174-27.

Having emerged from the grueling portion of its schedule, Missouri could figure prominently in the division race with a victory at Colorado — a scenario the Tigers kept in mind throughout three straight losses to Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Texas.

“Players know the schedule,” Missouri Coach Gary Pinkel said. “Without me saying anything, they know what’s out there. So it’s exciting.”

“We’ve got to decide who we want to be,” tailback Derrick Washington said. “We don’t want to be losers. We want to fight. People say we still have an opportunity to win the Big 12 North, and that’s what we’re shooting for. We’re shooting for nothing less than that.”

For Colorado, there’s another potential development that could further turn the North into a national punchline. What if the Buffs win the division with a 5-3 record but lose the conference championship game to finish 6-7? According to the

NCAA Postseason Football Handbook, a team that finishes 6-7 after dropping its conference title game must apply for a waiver to allow consideration for a bowl game.

Kansas State could face a quirky scenario, too. The Wildcats must win seven games to become bowl eligible because only one of their two victories over Football Championship Subdivision opponents, Massachusetts and Tennessee Tech, can count toward the six-win requirement for bowl eligibility. That means for Snyder's team to become bowl eligible, it must win two of four from Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska or win one of those games and upset the South Division winner in the Big 12 championship game.

So far, the Wildcats have embodied the Big 12 North's erratic quality. Here's a team that lost to Louisiana-Lafayette in September, was crushed by Texas Tech 66-14 on Oct. 10 then flipped the scoreboard and whacked Texas A&M 62-14 seven days later. To boggle the league logic further, Texas A&M blasted Texas Tech 52-30 Saturday.

Of the unexpected North contenders, Iowa State might be the most resilient. On Saturday, the 18-point underdog Cyclones won in Lincoln for the first time since 1977 despite playing without two critical injured starters — quarterback Austen Arnaud and running back Alexander Robinson, the Big 12's leading rusher.

And the rest of the schedule is anything but daunting: Of ISU's four remaining opponents, only Oklahoma State should be a hefty favorite.

"It's a crazy outcome for where the league is at this point," Rhoads said. "Everybody has a chance to win on every given Saturday. That's proved across the country more and more. ... But it doesn't mean things won't turn in a week or two for other programs."

Including Missouri, a team that heads to Boulder with the full understanding that its margin for error is down to its last drop.

"It's obvious what's going on" in the North Division. "We see the records and hear everything," MU linebacker Sean Weatherspoon said. "But we've got to get a win under our belt before we can worry about what's going on. Right now, we're at the bottom. And we want to work our way back up. You've got to put on your hard hat and focus on you, man."

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.

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Colorado searches for consistency

BY VAHE GREGORIAN
OF THE POST-DISPATCH

Thursday, Oct. 29 2009

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Mizzou might seem like a team in disarray after three straight losses to open Big 12 play, but — at least going into this week's game — the Tigers are downright stable compared to their foe on Saturday in Boulder, Colo.

Since winning four of five Big 12 North titles under Gary Barnett, Colorado is 15-29 under Dan Hawkins.

That includes losses to MU by a 113-10 margin over the last two seasons. And it includes a 2-5 start this season marked by a meandering offense (96th in the nation in scoring), mediocre defense (91st in points allowed), an unsettling quarterback controversy involving Hawkins' son, and Hawkins' own apparent mood swings. Hawkins, who has been uncharacteristically terse and defensive much of the season, was eerily animated at his Tuesday news conference.

That enthusiasm defined him when he arrived at CU after going 53-11 in five seasons at Boise State, and it generally continued even after last season's 5-7 finish: Looking to 2009, Hawkins declared "Ten wins, and no excuses" at an offseason banquet.

Whether it was in desperation, resignation or simply an attempt to get back to normal, the return to that exuberance was in some ways disconcerting.

During a 23-minute opening monologue Tuesday that began with him talking about his "deepest darkest moments," according to the Boulder Daily Camera, Hawkins shouted to quarterback Tyler Hansen in the back of the room to try to quell talk that Hansen is irked by the on-again, off-again role he shares with Cody Hawkins.

"There's no deceit going on," Hawkins said. "Tyler, have I been up-front with you from the get-go?"

Yes, said Hansen, who probably couldn't publicly have answered otherwise — even after he led CU to its improbable victory over then-undefeated Kansas only to be pulled in last week's loss at Kansas State.

While not discounting the possibility his son would continue to play, Hawkins later said, "Tyler is our quarterback. We're good with him, the team is good with him. I'm good with him. Cody's good with him."

Hawkins also read aloud letters of support he recently had received and noted he'd probably do some things differently now if he could. He stuck so closely with the theme of having a young team that he even noted the positives of having numerous freshmen redshirting.

And, yes, he expects to have the chance to coach them.

"I'm going to be here for a long time," he said, "and we're going to get this going. And it's going to be done right."

SMITH-EREENS

Obscured in the 41-7 thrashing by Texas was the ongoing emergence of freshman defensive end Aldon Smith, who had 11 solo tackles against the Longhorns and leads MU in sacks (five), tackles for loss (nine) and pass breakups (four).

His play has earned some buzz among teammates. Linebacker Sean Weatherspoon felt compelled to nickname Smith "The Great Aldini."

"Kind of like Houdini," Weatherspoon said.

NO ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

Asked about the impact of playing at altitude in Boulder, Mizzou coach Gary Pinkel scoffed and noted MU's last game there ... a 55-10 victory.

"I guess if you lose, it (has an impact)," he said, adding that the notion was "the most ridiculous thing I ever heard ... That's a myth — in my opinion."

Certainly it is for him personally. Pinkel said he had climbed Mt. Rainier (more than 14,000 feet) when he lived in Seattle. Boulder's elevation is about

5,400 feet.

TIGER TALES

Quarterback Blaine Gabbert practiced for the second straight day since coming out of a precautionary cast on his injured right ankle and is expected to start Saturday.

— Linebacker Luke Lambert suffered a dislocated shoulder against Texas and is out this week and perhaps for the season, depending on whether he opts for surgery.

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