

Buffaloes need to think big

Defense giving up big plays, while offense not putting them up

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For the third time in five games, the Colorado football team will face an opponent next week at Texas which is capable of going the distance on one play, scoring from any point on the field and infusing a packed stadium with energy in an instant.

CU players and coaches say they have that capability, too, but they haven't proven it like their opponents have.

While its defense has given up 11 plays of 40 yards or more through nonconference play, the CU offense has produced just two plays of 40 or more yards and the Buffs didn't score on either of them.

One of the big plays came in garbage time in a blowout loss at Toledo when wide receiver Anthony Wright got away with pushing off his defender along the sidelines to make a 42-yard catch.

The Colorado offense is dependent upon churning out seven-, eight-, 10- or 12-play drives to score points. Doing so requires third-down conversions, avoiding penalties, not committing turnovers and solid play from the quarterback. CU has been spotty at best in each of those areas.

"Well, we just need some big plays, and I think that comes from confidence and I think that comes from personnel and getting in a rhythm a little bit and getting in a groove there," coach Dan Hawkins said after his team lost at West Virginia on Thursday. "We kind of knew that a little bit coming into the season that we were going to have to be machine-like and have a blue-collar team and pound it out and play action and do those kinds of things."

The only player with true speed and big play ability who is consistently getting the football is tailback Rodney Stewart.

Tailback Darrell Scott has touched the ball on offense just 19 times in four games, with the majority of those chances coming in the first half of the Toledo game. He has been a nonfactor in three of the four games.

Wide receiver Markques Simas has been in the system for more than two years. He has played in his first two games the past two weeks, but didn't get his first two catches until late against the Mountaineers.

Junior college transfer Andre Simmons missed most of fall camp and started the season with a lot still to learn, but a month later, he still has only one catch for 44 yards, and that came in the season opener.

Wright, Brian Lockridge and Will Jefferson round out the list of Buffs who are not redshirting this season and have the speed and explosiveness to provide big plays. That trio has combined for nine touches thus far.

Meanwhile, quarterback Cody Hawkins seems to be locked in on wide receiver Scotty McKnight, who along with Stewart has been the workhorse of the offense and is playing at a high level.

Yet, McKnight is the first to admit he isn't a candidate to stretch the field and challenge defenses, clearly a missing ingredient in the CU system.

"We've got playmakers on this side of the ball that can do that," McKnight said. "I think as we grow up a little bit on the o-line and we keep hammering away and receivers keep blocking down field ... you know it's no secret that I'm not really a guy who is going to stretch the field. I'm a guy who can be consistent, get first downs and occasionally come up with a big play."

"Markques (Simas) is a guy who can turn the game around. I think I can, but I think he's the guy who can turn something into a long run. I think there are guys. On this roster. I think Dre (Andre Simmons), once he kind of figures it out and can go full speed, I think he's going to be a guy."

Until one or more of those players actually becomes the guy, the Buffs appear destined to a methodical approach. Cody Hawkins says he does have confidence in other wide receivers on the roster.

"I think if the biggest thing for us is just continue to play," Cody Hawkins said. "I think if we continue to do the basics correctly every single time, then it will give you an opportunity to take more shots down field. If you know you can get four or five yards a pop every time you run, it makes it a lot easier to sit back and try and throw a play-action ball down field."

Dan Hawkins pointed to one long pass play from his offense in the first half against the Mountaineers as an example of progress in the big play area even though it was just a close call.

Cody Hawkins heaved a well-placed ball down the sideline to wide receiver Markques Simas on a go route. Simas got one hand on the ball but didn't make the catch. He said a defender had a hold on his other arm, which prevented him from making the play.

Dan Hawkins said he expects to see more of those opportunities emerge as the season passes.

"I do think as those other guys come along and they are able to learn ... I think as those guys continue to get in the mix, we'll have a few more guys who can stretch the field and make some big plays."

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