

Colorado O-line knows it must improve

Bufs had high expectations entering season

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/10/2009 12:11:33 AM MDT

Execute.

Computer programmers are the only people more familiar with the word this week than the men in Colorado offensive line meetings.

The biggest Bufs came into the 2009 campaign with high expectations for themselves, despite the fact three members of the starting unit had never played much or any meaningful football at the college level.

That inexperience was exposed in the season opener by a solid Colorado State defense that held the Bufs to 29 net rushing yards and beat the blocking Bufs for four quarterback sacks.

"I felt like we were well prepared," redshirt freshman tackle Bryce Givens said. "We knew their defense and what they were bringing to the table and we just didn't get the job done."

That is what has bothered first-year offensive line coach Denver Johnson most in the days since. He also felt like his group had the information and preparation it needed to perform well. He said after meetings at the team hotel the night before the game he felt certain the Bufs would play well.

Instead, they were sloppy at times and inconsistent throughout. And they've had a short week to get things corrected before hitting the field for another game in the national spotlight Friday at Toledo.

"The thing I'm always trying to get across to our kids is, before you can win a game, you have to avoid losing it," Johnson said. "You know, missed assignments, foolish penalties, turnovers and missed tackles will take you out of a game quicker than anything."

Johnson said there are no big fixes to be made this week. His players simply have to execute their assignments on every play.

Colorado faces an aggressive Toledo defense that likes to use speed to disrupt the run and blitzing to get to the quarterback. The Rockets gave up 315 yards on the ground last week to Purdue in a game CU coaches say was much closer than the 52-31 final scores indicates. It should help that center Mike Itlis is probable for the game after missing all but the first six snaps of the CSU game. His replacement, Keenan Stevens, played well in his absence, but losing Itlis so early in the game compounded problems because it added more unfamiliarity.

"It was rough," guard Ryan Miller said describing his first game back after his season ending prematurely in 2008 when he broke his leg against Florida State. "We didn't execute."

"We've got to take our right steps, we've got to know our assignments and we just have to execute."

Miller said the Bufs didn't play as physical as they are capable, but part of that was a function of not having enough confidence in what is supposed to happen.

"I think we could have been a lot more physical, but when you don't know who to hit, it really doesn't matter," Miller said.

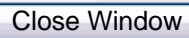
Ineffective offensive line play is nothing new to CU. The program endured the problem throughout most of last year when injuries ravaged the line, forcing players into action who had been expected to spend the season on the scout team.

Johnson predicted during training camp there would be bumps in the road with first-time starters Ethan Adkins, Itlis and

Givens breaking in at the college level and Miller moving from tackle to guard. The one stable spot on the line from last year is Nate Solder at left tackle and even he gave up a sack against CSU.

Givens said both sacks given up by the tackles occurred because of communication issues that will be ironed out as the season moves forward. But it might take some time before the unit is operating at the level some expect to be at now.

"If it doesn't click up front, it's not going to click anywhere else," Johnson said. "...It's no one's fault. It's all our responsibility though to go make it better. That's exactly the attitude they're taking. So that's encouraging."

A rectangular button with a light blue gradient and a thin border, containing the text "Close Window".A rectangular button with a light blue gradient and a thin border, containing the text "Send To Printer".

CU Buffs set for road game rarity

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/10/2009 12:06:50 AM MDT

The Colorado football program is well-known for tough scheduling in nonconference play, and there is further evidence of it this week.

Coach Dan Hawkins was 16 years old the last time the program played a team from a non-Bowl Championship Series conference in a true road game outside the state. Almost 32 years later, the Buffs will head for the airport this afternoon for a flight to Toledo where they face the Rockets at The Glass Bowl Stadium on Friday night.

The Buffs have been to Fort Collins to play Colorado State a few times during that span, but a lot of football seasons have come and gone since the program boarded a plane to face anyone other than a BCS foe in the regular season on the road outside Colorado.

Jimmy Carter was president and Bill Mallory was head coach in Boulder in October of 1977 when CU traveled to New York for a game with Army. The Buffs won 31-0.

BCS teams have been making more trips to play at smaller schools in recent years because those programs are demanding a chance to play the big boys on their home turf. Non-BCS teams are even willing to go as far as scheduling two or three games on the road against the BCS program in exchange for one game on their home field.

Look no further than Laramie, Wyo., this weekend for a perfect example. Generally the only time the Texas Longhorns leave the Lone Star state is for a nonconference game against a team such as Ohio State, a conference game or a bowl game. They play in Laramie on Saturday because the Cowboys agreed to visit Austin, Texas twice.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said non-BCS schools are becoming more shrewd in the scheduling game, which has forced some difficult choices for programs. Some opt to play the road games. Others choose to schedule more home games against teams from the Football Championship Subdivision.

Hawkins, who spent five seasons at Boise State and has seen things from the perspective of the little guy, said he sees Friday's game as an abnormality more than a trend.

"It doesn't happen very much," he said of BCS programs going on the road to play non-BCS schools.

Colorado originally was supposed to play Miami (Ohio) this season, another team from the MidAmerican Conference. But the Redhawks backed out last spring in order to play Kentucky on a neutral field in Cincinnati for a bigger pay day.

CU had only scheduled Miami (Ohio) in the first place back in 2006 because ESPN agreed to televise the return game. ESPN honored that promise and helped set up this season's game last spring.

Mahnke back

Secondary coach Greg Brown said he is hoping strong safety Patrick Mahnke will be able to play against Toledo, after missing the season opener with a sprained ankle. Brown said the sophomore safety was able to practice for the first time Wednesday, but it remains unclear if he will be ready to face a Toledo passing game that put up more than 400 yards in Week 1.

"They're a nightmare for a secondary and for a pass defense," Brown said.

Brown said Toledo senior wide receiver Stephen Williams is a pro prospect. Williams looked the part in the Rockets season opening loss to Purdue. He caught 15 passes for 185 yards and two touchdowns.

Brown is also impressed with Toledo quarterback Aaron Opelt, who comes into the game, albeit after only one week,

leading the nation in passing. Opelt completed 41 of 67 attempts for 423 yards and three scores.

Both Brown and Dan Hawkins said there are similarities between what Toledo does offensively and what Missouri runs. That might be very bad news.

The past two times the Buffs have played Missouri, the Tigers have won by a combined score of 113-10.

Notable

Scotty McKnight said he is feeling better after suffering a concussion in the opener and he expects to play Friday. ... Walk-on true freshman quarterback Jerry Slota has been temporarily suspended for the team. Hawkins said he is gathering more information about Slota's situation.

Close Window

Send To Printer



Big12SPORTS.COM
THE OFFICIAL WEB SITE OF THE BIG 12 CONFERENCE

Colorado Student-Athlete Feature: Ben Burney

Release: 09/10/2009

by Big12Sports.com



Forward to Friend



Print Page



RSS Feeds



ADD THIS



By Nick Bernal

Big 12 Campus Correspondent

University of Colorado defensive standout Benjamin Burney is entering his senior season, and couldn't be happier about finally being able to compete with a clean bill of health after spending last season on "injured reserve."

Burney started all 13 games in 2007 as the Buffaloes closed out the season in the Independence Bowl. Playing that much took a toll on the 5-11, 195-pound cornerback's body. As the season progressed, Burney would have trouble getting out of the bathtub and out of bed. The everyday activities that are taken for granted became challenges.



Courtesy: Big12Sports.com

After playing through the injuries, Burney took a redshirt season in 2008 as he underwent five surgeries -on both shoulders, both wrists and a knee. He needed most of the year off just to recover and rehab.

"I really wanted to be healthy," he said. "It was difficult playing with all of those injuries and not being able to actually live properly, without even playing football just being able to live my natural life."

Burney was one of just eight Colorado players to play in every game in 2007. He sat out just 34 defensive snaps and was on the field for 796 plays. Considering that he was playing with bad wrists, bad shoulders and a balky knee, his endurance was remarkable.

"I just focused on the fact that I was starting, so I was going to play regardless," Burney said. "It didn't matter what I had to do to get out on that football field. I had to cold tub a lot, I had to ice a bunch, I didn't get to sleep much in the hotel (road games) because I had to ice several times a night and just doing all that I could so that my joints would function properly the next morning.

"Really when it came down to it, when I was not playing football and I was still suffering football pain, that's when I knew that I needed to have surgery after the season. I went and talked to (Colorado coach Dan Hawkins) and the team doctors about it and they said they'd give me a redshirt so that I could have the surgeries - which worked out great because I didn't redshirt my freshman year."

While the physical consequences to having five surgeries in a 10 month period are obvious, the mental aspect cannot be overlooked either. It takes an incredible amount of mental toughness not only to get through the five surgeries and the necessary rehab, but staying positive throughout the whole process can be difficult.

"It kept me away from my family - that being the team - so I felt like an outsider and maybe even a little mutinous at times," Burney said. "It was harder mentally than it was physically because physically you have to wait a little while and be patient while everything gets back to normal and focus on the big picture.

"I really took Coach Hawk's visualization to heart because they said in therapy that your nervous system will actually think that you're doing these things that you're visualizing because your nerves don't really know the difference when you really get into the visualization. So I'd visualize a lot about coming out here and doing what I'm doing now. The physical limitations were

easier to deal with because I knew that my body would get beat up and that I'd get skinny and small, but I was excited about when I could come back and lift and now I really relish when I get to come back and do all of these things."

Burney lost about 20 pounds of muscle during his redshirt season. He didn't fully regain that weight until a few months ago when he was able to fully commit to the offseason workout program.

"I really felt like a fiend for a little while," Burney said. "I would have a surgery, then I'd have another one and another so I didn't really have a chance to be able to rebuild my body or anything like that. I had to make sure that they were being taken care of properly because I couldn't really be standing out here in the elements with the stitches and stuff."

While all players need their bodies to be as close to 100 percent as possible, Burney the self-appointed 'Last Super Saiyan' needs to be in near perfect shape to perform with the aggressive and hard hitting style that he has become known for. The nickname came from the anime series Dragon Ball Z, where a Saiyan is an aggressive extraterrestrial being that is the strongest warrior in the show.

During his downtime last year, Burney wrote a book that was published and is available on Amazon.com and LuLu.com, but due to NCAA regulations the name of his book cannot be revealed. The motivation for writing the book was the desire to give him something productive to do with his time and a much needed outlet for his emotions.

"Really the motivation was free time," Burney said. "I knew a person like me having too much free time I might get into trouble. So I decided I better just stay in the house and do something constructive. The book really came about with some free time and some venting."

In 2007, Burney started at cornerback opposite two-time first team All-Big 12 cornerback and current New England Patriot Terrence Wheatley. Burney had 55 tackles and eight pass deflections. He plans to return to his aggressive style of play in 2009.

"I really want us to be an aggressive unit both offensively and defensively," said Burney, who had an interception in Colorado's season opener. "We definitely have the skill and the talent to do that, and we definitely have it in us to do that. I see it within us - within all of us - and we just have to believe it. Some of our younger guys need to believe they are who we know they are. Once that happens we're going to be playing hard, playing like we're brothers and whatever stands against us is not going to prosper.

"My goal is just to be out here and be with my brothers, be happy and be smiling. I really don't care about playing time as much, I don't care about individual goals or achievements, I really just care about what the team can do and being happy while we do it."

[▶ Back](#)



denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

cu football

How to beat the boo birds

Coach Hawkins feeling heat, looks to new receivers to give the offense some oomph.

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/10/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — When somebody told Colorado coach Dan Hawkins to "prepare for land mines" after choosing his son, junior Cody Hawkins, as the starting quarterback over sophomore Tyler Hansen, the coach replied, "That's just one more."

Times are tough after a 23-17 loss to Colorado State on Sunday night, after which Rams fans stormed the field, including some who stomped on the Buffalo logo. Yes, father and son heard the boos. They were impossible to ignore.

Accusations of nepotism have ruled sports talk radio all week.

"I understand (people) think that's part of it," Dan Hawkins said. "But if that were the case, I would have never benched Cody last year."

"So then, we said, 'We're going the Tyler way.'"

Well, we struggled that way. So we brought Cody back in, and darn if he didn't play well the rest of the

Colorado Football

- **View** slide show of Wyoming-CU football Sept. 19 .
- **Analyze** boxscore for Wyoming-CU football Sept. 19 .
- **View** slide show of Colorado-Toledo football Sept. 11 .
- **Analyze** boxscore for Colorado-Toledo football Sept. 11 .
- **View** slide show of Colorado State-Colorado football Sept. 6 .
- **Watch** video of Rocky Mountain Showdown .
- **View** slide show of Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins .
- **Visit** the CU Stats Page for boxscores, Big 12 standings, team leaders and more .
- **Visit** Tom Kensler's All Things Buffs blog for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports .

season. Everybody is looking for that focal point, but if you're inside the football offices, we're talking all the time about every personnel group, every player. We're looking for the best 22 players and trying to create roles for everybody."

Cody said he can't get caught up in what others are writing or saying, or booing. He is

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
Save even more by entering promo code 61689 in our online shopping cart

SHOP ONLINE WITH FREE STATEWIDE DELIVERY

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase. One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers. Expires 10-31-07

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

concentrating on Friday night's game at Toledo (0-1).

"(The criticism) is not too bad, because I have a lot of confidence in myself," Cody said. "There are always people judging you, just because we're in such a privileged position. You have to look at it this way — a lot of people must be passionate about your sport if they're making a big deal out of it."

Dan Hawkins said the offense can take a leap forward when the new receivers become comfortable, improving timing. Junior Scotty McKnight is the only receiver on the roster with much experience. Junior college transfer Andre Simmons and freshman Will Jefferson played in their first CU games Sunday.

"Most of the time when Cody throws to Scotty, (the pass) is right there," Dan Hawkins said. "They're on the same page, whether it's a coverage read or a throw or a break. That comes with time."

Offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said his unit must simply improve.

"The thing we have to remember is, we're still very, very young," Kiesau said. "Yes, we have good players. But they're young. That's not an excuse. We just all have to continue to progress."

Deciding on a No. 1 QB was a first step, offensive line coach Denver Johnson said.

"I think it's maybe a little bit easier on

everybody," Johnson said. "We know kind of what we're expecting in practice."

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

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
Save even more by entering promo code 61689 in our online shopping cart

SHOP ONLINE WITH FREE STATEWIDE DELIVERY

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase. One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers. Expires 10-31-07

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Sunday, September 27,
2009

Publish Date: 9/10/2009

Colorado O-line looks to start over

By Patrick Ridgell
© 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — It sounds like Colorado's offensive line is embarrassed. It has ample reason.

Among the indignities from Sunday's loss to Colorado State is CU's rushing total of 29 yards, and allowing four sacks to a team that mustered all of 10, the lowest total in Division I, in 2008. So what was the problem, and how do they fix it for Friday's game at Toledo (7 p.m., ESPN)?

"We didn't play very well," offensive line coach Denver Johnson said.

Johnson actually said a lot more.

While saying center Keenan Stevens did "pretty well" filling in for Mike Iltis, losing Iltis on the game's sixth offensive snap "certainly didn't help anything."

Asked if first-game jitters played a role, Johnson observed how three Buffs — Iltis, right tackle Bryce Givens and left guard Ethan Adkins — made their first starts. Iltis and Givens had never taken a snap. Right guard Ryan Miller made his first start at a new position and his first game appearance since breaking a leg last September against Florida State.

"They were pretty amped up to get going, and just handling that stage, that environment, they probably didn't handle it very well," Johnson said. "Now we have a game under our belts."

But Johnson's main point was the line was not always "assignment correct." For those who believe the line got beat up by CSU's defensive line, that it wasn't physical enough when physicality was supposed to be its calling card, there's an explanation.

"I think we could have been a lot more physical, but if you really don't know who to hit, it really doesn't matter," Miller said.

Miller answered "we didn't execute" to several questions he received Wednesday. He added, "I really think we just ended up beating ourselves."

Johnson said that to fix things, the line is going back to fundamentals, focusing on footwork and hand placement.

"Just start at the top and work your way down to the bottom," he said. "There's nothing there that you can omit, that we don't need to work on."

If Iltis' sprained ankle keeps him from playing Friday, Stevens will start at center, Johnson said. CU lists Iltis as probable.

Johnson said there will be no other changes to the starters. He wanted to rotate reserves Sunday, but game circumstances prevented it.

Matt Bahr, who suffered a high ankle sprain in camp, is still not full speed and not an option at this point, Johnson said. The coach added guard Max Tuioti-Mariner, who started twice last year before tearing an ACL in September, remains a long way off.

CU's offensive line is its youngest and least experienced in years, possibly ever. It has no seniors. According to CU records, the program has never gone a year without a senior on its offensive line. The last time it didn't have at least one senior starter was 1998.

Left tackle Nate Solder graded out at 89 percent Sunday, the line's highest number. Adkins was the lowest at 75 percent. Givens was 84 percent, Miller was 79 percent and Stevens was 85 percent.

"I feel like that's a big part of it — understanding what the defense is doing and what we need to do in order to account for their formations," Iltis said. "That way we're assignment correct and not leaving ... people that are able to slow the running back when they get into the hole."

EXTRA POINTS: Head coach Dan Hawkins said walk-on quarterback Jerry Slota has been "temporarily suspended from the football team until we ascertain further evidence." Hawkins did not say what evidence he's seeking, or why Slota was suspended. Hawkins said freshmen quarterbacks Clark Evans and Seth Lobato will both make the trip to Toledo. ... Hawkins said the team has avoided the flu that has hit campus for the past two weeks. ... Safety Patrick Mahnke (sprained ankle) is listed as questionable for Friday. Secondary coach Greg Brown said he's "hopeful" Mahnke can play. ... Linebacker Michael Sipili (knee) is questionable. Receiver Scotty McKnight (concussion) is probable.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.