

CU Buffs aim for fast start to football season

Rival Colorado St. pays visit to Folsom Field for nationally televised tilt

By Kyle Ringo, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/06/2009 12:11:13 AM MDT

A handful of programs around the country began the college football season this weekend using two quarterbacks at different times to keep their opponents off balance and build experience at the position.

Other programs learned how valuable having two competent quarterbacks can be. No. 3 Oklahoma dropped its opener to Brigham Young when 2008 Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford left with a shoulder injury and redshirt freshman Landry Jones couldn't save the day.

Colorado fans might feel a little more comfortable this morning about their quarterback situation even though they still don't know who the starter will be this season. Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen spent the second half of last season sharing playing time under center for the Buffs and have competed for the position throughout the offseason.

Coach Dan Hawkins has waited until today to reveal the winner of that fight prior to kickoff of the season opener at Folsom Field (5:10 p.m. FSN) against Colorado State. Hawkins has said he doesn't believe there is a big difference in the two players and both will probably see playing time this season.

The favorite is Cody Hawkins, the coach's son, because he has 25 career games under his belt and has been the regular starter the past two seasons. It would be a surprise if Hansen gets the call because he is far less experienced.

The Buffs begin a pivotal season today and desperately need improved quarterback play to reach their goal of a 10-win season. CU has finished the past three years ranked in the bottom half of the Big 12 Conference in offense. All three of those seasons have ended with a losing record.

After a strong offseason, players feel they are ready to turn the corner.

"We're definitely well on our way, and if people don't know that, then they don't understand the whole schematics of building a program or the whole structure and makeup of a team," Cody Hawkins said. "We're there. We're very close. We're hands down better than we've been since I've been here. A lot of that is going to kind of hinge on how I play."

The quarterback decision might be foremost in the minds of CU fans today, but it's probably not on the minds of most of the players. They want to prove themselves and re-establish the program as one of the elite programs in the conference and the nation.

To understand the psyche of the Buffs entering the 2009 campaign, it's necessary to go back to late November last year in Memorial Stadium in Nebraska where the Buffs believed they had earned a bowl trip despite a very challenging season.

A 57-yard field goal tore their hearts out and ended the season.

"I think that day in Nebraska really kind of lit a fire under a bunch of us," wide receiver Scotty McKnight said. "At the time, it hurt and it was really painful, but I think it helped us because guys were working harder and we were working for something. We want to put some more wins on the board this year and I think that gave us something we needed."

McKnight is not alone in that opinion. The entire offseason for the Buffs has been about refusing to accept mediocrity anymore and re-building a swagger the program used to carry.

"It was used a lot as motivation to redeem ourselves," linebacker B.J. Beatty said of the way last year ended. "This team has been working hard and I see a lot of confidence in this team."

The Buffs should be a confident bunch entering today's game. They're facing a team they beat handily a year ago on a

neutral field in Denver, but the Rams have a lot of holes to fill, including its quarterback.

Senior Grant Stucker will make his first career start in a rivalry game in a hostile environment for the Rams. One the interesting story lines heading into the game is how well Stucker will handle it.

Stucker has played sparingly in his four previous seasons in Fort Collins with just five games under his belt. He has run for more yardage in his career than he has gained through the air, and preventing him from scrambling to make plays will be critical for the CU defense.

The game will become a battle of two relatively inexperienced signal callers if Hansen is named the Buffs' starter.

Eight Buffs also are expected to make the first start of their careers, including three offensive linemen, but the number of first-time starters ultimately depend on what packages the offense and defense open the game.

Colorado already won one contest with the Rams this week. Zack Craig, a defensive back prospect from Spring Branch, Texas, chose the Buffs over their in-state rivals in recruiting. Craig became the fifth known commitment for the class of 2010. He predicted a 34-24 final Saturday night and says he will be glued to the television.

CU holds a commanding advantage in the history of the series and is expected to win every year, but especially when the rivalry is played in Boulder. Dan Hawkins is 2-1 against the Rams with a two-game winning streak.

This is the first time in Hawkins' tenure he has faced the Rams at home in Folsom Field, and it will probably be the only time he does so. The schools announced earlier this week the series will be played in Denver for the next 10 years.

The Buffs have spent the past nine months dedicated to becoming a winning program. Their coach challenged them to win 10 games this year. With that in mind, they have talked about the need to start fast in 2009.

"So much of a college football season I think has to do with momentum, because no matter what everybody says, we are still a bunch of kids," Cody Hawkins said. "We still get homesick and we still miss our parents. The whole mental aspect of the game is huge."

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Woelk: Turnaround must begin tonight for Hawkins` Buffs

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/05/2009 11:58:49 PM MDT

Former Colorado coach Bill McCartney never liked the Colorado State game.

For Mac -- especially after the Buffs had turned the corner into the national spotlight under his guidance -- the CSU game was a no-win affair. He treated it more as a necessary evil; not something to be embraced. Mac had bigger fish to fry, and when he left CU, he had a 6-1 record against the Rams and had clearly established Colorado as the dominant program in the state.

Today, though, it's a different story. Rick Neuheisel followed McCartney's footsteps with a 4-0 record against CSU, but by the time Gary Barnett arrived in Boulder, Sonny Lubick had the Rams in the midst of their most successful run in school history.

It's been a relatively even series since. While Colorado has won five of the last six, last season's 38-17 Buff win was the first time in seven years that the game was decided by more than seven points.

Thus, the question for tonight is simple: Can Steve Fairchild, in his second year at CSU, close the gap that started to open last year, or can CU's Dan Hawkins widen the gulf?

We'll bet on the latter, for a variety of reasons.

The biggest reason, of course, is that the Buffs are more talented across the board. Hawkins has had four years to recruit his players and build his program. While there are still holes to fill -- and plenty of rough spots ahead, particularly in the Big 12 -- this is the first time in his tenure that CU fans can say the Buffs' talent level is at least comparable to that of Barnett's last couple of squads.

Fairchild, meanwhile, has no such luxury. He is enduring the effect of some lean recruiting classes in the final years of the Lubick era and has not had the time to rebuild. CSU's experience level is still thin in far too many places.

The reality is that it's hard to find a place on the field where the Rams have any kind of clear edge.

Then there's the home-field advantage, something that will disappear in the series after this year. The comfort of Folsom Field and the edge it should give the Buffs can't be underestimated.

While the biggest story surrounding the game in the buildup has been the mystery concerning CU's starting quarterback (Hawkins or Hansen?), it really doesn't matter. Both are capable, and the onus to perform tonight will be on the running game, not the quarterback.

And, here's a guess: before the night is over, CU's defense will make a name for itself as the foundation for this year's team.

More than one Buff coach in fall camp has quietly pointed to the defense as the team strength, and there's a reason. The Buffs are talented and deep at linebacker and in the secondary. The Buffs are inexperienced up front, but we'll bet coordinator Ron Collins and secondary boss Greg Brown have some schemes up their sleeves that will compensate for that deficiency.

But the main story line tonight is the series. Long gone are the days that McCartney's and Neuheisel's teams dominated. It is now a rivalry, so much so that the schools have agreed to play the next 10 years on a neutral field in order to reap the biggest financial benefit.

And then there are the implications. If you're looking for which team can least afford a loss tonight, there's no question. It will be the squad dressed in black and gold.

This is the year that virtually everyone connected with CU's program -- from Dan Hawkins on down to the fans in the cheap seats -- has said should signal a turnaround in the Buffs' fortunes.

The only way to start that turnaround is with a victory tonight.

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CU-CSU matchups

Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/06/2009 12:20:25 AM MDT

CU RUN OFFENSE VS. CSU RUN DEFENSE -- Colorado has a young offensive line with three new starters with little or no playing time under their belts. They will make mistakes, but their collective size and talent will be tough on defenses. The Buffs have four solid options at tailback and figure to give them all opportunities each week. Rodney Stewart could be held out today because of a hamstring and thigh that have given him trouble in camp. CSU has to toughen up this year to have any chance to win this game. The Rams gave up 190 yards on the ground each week last year and ranked 102nd in the nation against the run. **Edge: CU.**

CU PASS OFFENSE VS. CSU PASS DEFENSE -- We're expecting Cody Hawkins to start today and rebound this season from a rough 2008. But even if Tyler Hansen gets the call, this offense is better prepared to make plays through the air because it has options and an offensive line to get people blocked, which wasn't the case for much of last year. With more speed and athleticism on the outside and CSU focusing on stopping the run, players such as Scotty McKnight and Riar Geer could have a big day. CSU ranked 96th in the nation in passing efficiency defense last fall. The Rams will probably improve this season but not at once. **Edge: CU.**

CSU RUN OFFENSE VS. CU RUN DEFENSE -- This is where the game might be won or lost. If the Buffs can hold up against what has been billed as the most experienced offensive line in the nation, it will fall to an inexperienced CSU quarterback to beat the Buffs through the air. CSU averaged 4.2 yards a carry and 147 yards a game last year, but this team doesn't have a back with Gartrell Johnson's skills. We will finally see how big a liability the CU defensive line will be, if it is at all. CU can put a lot of speed on the field with a deep and talented linebacking corps, and they will be tough to block. **Edge: EVEN.**

CSU PASS OFFENSE VS. CU PASS DEFENSE -- The young CU defensive line must get some pressure on the inexperienced quarterback. It will probably have some help from blitzing linebackers and safeties. CU was solid against the pass in 2008 and has a lot of experience and talent in the back half of its defense. We're expecting some turnovers from this group today. Rams senior quarterback Grant Stucker is making his first college start in a rivalry game in hostile territory. He does have plenty of experience around him and that ought to help him make a few plays. **Edge: CU.**

SPECIAL TEAMS -- Then kicking game was a nightmare for Colorado last season, and the team lost its best weapon in the offseason when Josh Smith chose to transfer. Place-kicker Aric Goodman takes over the kickoff duties, but has something to prove when it comes to making field goals. Jason Espinoza will return punts and Darrell Scott will return kickoffs. Both teams had a kickoff return for a touchdown in this game last season. Colorado State place-kicker Ben DeLine was much more reliable last season and the Rams have capable players making returns. This is an easy call. **Edge: CSU.**

COACHING -- All the pressure in this one is on Dan Hawkins. Of course, Steve Fairchild would never agree with that, but the truth is Colorado is expected to win this game every year and after winning easily on a neutral field a year ago, even more so this season. Hawkins is using a new offensive approach for the second straight year under a new offensive coordinator and offensive line coach. There are bound to be some adjustments to be made. Fairchild might have to get creative and will definitely have to take some chances to win this. **Edge: CU.**

PREDICTION -- Colorado 37-12

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dave krieger

Krieger: Big picture — CU-CSU game at Invesco is a smart move

By Dave Krieger
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/06/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

Tonight's traditional opening of the Rocky Mountain college football season — the 81st meeting between Colorado and Colorado State — will be the last edition of the in-state rivalry played in Boulder for at least a decade.

Some CU fans are unhappy about this. They think college football belongs in college stadiums on college campuses, particularly theirs. And generally speaking, they're right, although not in this case.

In fact, word of the landmark 10-year deal to play the game at Invesco Field in Denver starting next year had some of them calling the CU athletic department in a panic.

"I've had some people call and say, 'Hey, is it

true we've moved the Nebraska game?' " CU athletic director Mike Bohn reported. "The answer is no, absolutely not. We're committed to all the other six games in Boulder, regardless of who we're playing. So when we host Georgia in '10 and Cal in '11 and Washington in '15, those games will be in Boulder."

Imagine how CSU feels. The last time this game was played in Fort Collins, Rick Neuheisel was the CU coach. CSU has turned its home games into Denver games since 1996. The calculation was pretty easy. More than doubling the capacity of Sonny Lubick Field improved everything from the profile of the game to the pay day.

CU was always the harder sell, in part because it made certain promises when it sold high-end amenities at Folsom Field. Among them was a minimum of six home games.

Bohn's predecessor, Dick Tharp, needed the CSU game in Boulder in 2004 and 2005 to satisfy that commitment. Bohn needed this year's there for the same reason. Those are the only three out of the last 12 not played in Denver.

That wasn't fair competitively — CU played only home and neutral site games while CSU played only road and neutral site games — but CU would not be moved. Not until Denver leaders, including Mayor John Hickenlooper and sports commission officials Steve McConahey and KieAnn Brownell, got involved.

"It just seemed like an opportunity that was kind of slipping away," Hickenlooper said. "You know

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when you were in high school they talked about potential energy? A boulder could be on the side of the hill and just a little bit of a nudge, once it gets going, all hell breaks loose. Well, in a very positive way, I think that's what a lot of us are hopeful that this game could be."

A lot of us in Denver have argued for years that making CU-CSU a showcase event in the state capital elevates the schools, the rivalry and college football itself, which can have a tough time finding oxygen in this pro-dominated sports market. But we don't answer to alumni associations, as Bohn and CSU athletic director Paul Kowalczyk do. Hickenlooper tried to raise the stakes on the conversation above the parochial concerns that had created the stalemate.

"It is one of the more high-profile things that CU and CSU are engaged in — for better or for worse; you can love or hate it," the mayor said. "But sports often becomes this symbol of something bigger. That's why people are so attracted to sports; certainly one reason.

"By having the game on neutral turf where the vast majority of the alumni live, it allows both schools to have an emotional investment in the game and that translates into an emotional investment, or a reinvestment, into the universities.

"The alumni are where you get the critical mass, but then everyone gets swept along. And I think that in a way this is a golden opportunity for people to really kind of step up and begin to

appreciate the magnitude of the contribution of CU and CSU."

We know it went to the top of the university administration because Hickenlooper credits CU president Bruce Benson for seeing the big picture.

"I think he clearly saw a larger vision there that this game could be more than just sports," the mayor said. "It could be an avenue for the whole region to support our state universities. I think Benson deserves a lot of credit for that."

The pressure now falls on Bohn to find nonconference opponents willing to play at Folsom without a reciprocal visit from CU. With the CSU game in Denver for the next decade, two of CU's three remaining nonconference games each year must be at Folsom to satisfy the six home game guarantee.

"The commitment to ensure that six games are always in Boulder on our regular schedule, coupled with the game in Denver, created a seven-game home scenario for us for the next 10 years, which is really unprecedented in our history," Bohn said. "We believe that makes a lot of sense for us economically, but also competitively."

Who says nobody ever puts aside parochial interests for the greater good? Showcasing this game in Denver each year is a no-brainer. If Hickenlooper can break this stalemate, maybe he should sit down with Josh McDaniels and Brandon Marshall.

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rocky mountain showdown

The next big moment for CU kicker Goodman

CSU at CU: 5 p.m. today at Folsom Field in Boulder, TV: FSN

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/06/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 09/06/2009 01:54:20 AM MDT



Colorado place-kicker Aric Goodman is hoping to kick it through the uprights after making adjustments in his approach after a dismal 2008 season. (Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Kodak moments for college place-kickers don't get tucked in the back of a photo album somewhere. They get blown up the size of stadium video screens.

So sit back and watch the kicking life of Colorado's Aric Goodman pass by in either spectacular color or dull shades of gray.

Click: Isolating himself in his Laramie apartment three years ago, days after his extra-point attempt goes wide right and Wyoming loses at Virginia in overtime, 13-12.

Click: Sitting in his Boulder apartment last year, exhausted from exhilaration and the new gift of an athletic scholarship, after his 25-yard field goal beats West Virginia in overtime on national TV, 17-14.

Click: Getting heckled on campus after he responds to the scholarship by missing his next eight field-goal attempts.

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Colorado Football

- **View** slide show of Wyoming-CU football Sept. 19 .
- **Analyze** boxscore for Wyoming-CU football Sept. 19 .
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- **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 .

Click: Ending the season with two field goals, the latter a 37-yarder, that helped CU nearly upset Nebraska in the season finale.

"I've gotten a bunch of opportunities a bunch of people don't get," Goodman said. "I'm extremely grateful for those things. But the few failures I've had in my life I've shared on a national scale."

Goodman is sitting alone in the Dal Ward Center last week, knowing full well that at 5 p.m. today

he will be anything but alone. He'll be in front of a packed Folsom Field crowd and a national TV audience for the season opener against rival Colorado State.

He and his coaches are telling fans to relax. This is not a tortured soul. Not now, anyway. The staff opened up the kicking competition last spring, and Goodman has been blowing away the field since.

He has nailed a new two-step approach and has the unwavering support of a twin sister and father who know a little about kicking. Ally Goodman is a midfielder on Colorado's 15th-ranked soccer team and their dad, Curtis, kicked for Hawaii from 1976-78.

More important, Aric has the support of CU coach Dan Hawkins.

"He's kicking well right now," Hawkins said. "Probably the good thing for him was last year he was perfect in camp going in and that probably snakebit him. Now he's not quite perfect, but he's still kicking a pretty high percentage."

Family support boosts confidence

A year ago at this time, Hawkins thought his kicking question was answered for the next three years. Goodman, a Cherry Creek High graduate, thought his prayer was answered forever. He had walked on at Colorado after small-town Laramie became harder to handle than missed extra points. It was Sept. 18 and his 25-yarder against West Virginia in overtime

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ignited a fan avalanche that engulfed Goodman in a sea of black.

He managed to escape to the locker room without getting

Colorado State Football

- **View** slide show of Nevada-Colo. St. football Sept. 19 .
- **Analyze** boxscore for Nevada-Colo. St. football Sept. 19 .
- **View** slide show of Weber St.-Colo. St. football Sept. 12 .
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- **View** slide show of CSU football practice Aug. 10 .
- **Visit** the CSU Stats Page for boxscores, MWC standings, team leaders and more .
- **Visit** Natalie Meisler's All Things Rams blog for a behind-the-scenes look at CSU sports

mass-hugged right onto the injured list. When he emerged, Ally and Curtis had tears in their eyes. Then it got better. Aric told them Hawkins gave him a scholarship. Ally began to cry.

"Having the opportunity to kick a game-winning field goal in any situation and then put it on national TV; it's West Virginia, at home; then getting the scholarship on top of it — words can't describe the emotion and jubilation," Aric said.

Plenty of words describe his next two months, none of them good. No miss cost Colorado a game, but his confidence was slipping away as fast as the Buffaloes' season. Trouble was, he couldn't pinpoint the problem. Four kicks went wide left, three went wide right. Two hit uprights. One was blocked. The fact that only two were under 43 yards didn't matter. Goodman finished 5-of-14, and Colorado's 6-for-17 on field goals (Jameson Davis was 1-for-3) was the worst in Division I-A football.

"I felt I did something wrong each time, something small," Goodman said. "In this position, something small means a lot."

While his confidence waned, support didn't. Hawkins never ripped him in the media. Sometimes he'd walk him from the practice field to Folsom Field with the snapper and holder.

They'd stand on the sideline and Hawkins would call for a field goal. They'd go through the same routine as in a game, sans rushing linemen and screaming crowd.

More than anything, however, Goodman found strength in his dad and twin sister. Ally was the one who'd catch kicks for him during warm-ups and at halftime at Cherry Creek. She's the one giving him a thumb's up

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from a couple rows up on the 50 during Colorado games.



CU-CSU SCOUTING REPORT (Click image to enlarge)

"I just let him know that he knows he's capable of doing it," she said. "I tell him to keep his head up. By no means was he missing badly. I told him to not listen to anybody else and he can do it. We've all seen him do it before."

Adjustment helps eliminate motions

Unfortunately, sometimes he had to listen to others. In the offseason, he'd hear students say, "Hey, you were terrible this year" or "You had an awful year." He didn't argue.

"I think it was a big hardship on him," Curtis said. "I think it was extremely difficult. But to tell you the truth, I know a lot of people who wouldn't have taken what had transpired last year. I really give him a lot of credit for not giving

up."

Aric also did something about it. With the help of special-teams coach Kent Riddle, Goodman junked the little jab step he had been using and became a two-step kicker. Like a golf or baseball swing, Riddle said, the less motion, the fewer things that can go wrong.

The same adjustment turned Adam Vinatieri from an undrafted no-name out of South Dakota State to a Super Bowl hero for the New England Patriots. The Buffaloes will settle for some celebratory pictures of Goodman in the paper.

The next snapshot will be taken tonight.

"He seems to be as confident as anyone could possibly be," Curtis said. "He could get on a roll and if he makes three or four in a row to start the season, I think great things will happen."

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rocky mountain showdown

Five questions for the Rams' and Buffs' coordinators

By Chris Dempsey
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/06/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT



CSU offensive coordinator says of CSU quarterback Grant Stucker: "Grant is a very talented young man. ... Athletically he's the real deal. So, I'll be anxious and excited to see what Grant can do this weekend." (Judy DeHaas, The Denver Post)

Offense: Facing hungry and aggressive units

CSU offensive coordinator Greg Peterson

Q: What concerns you most about Colorado's defense?

A: As you look at a defense from a year ago that

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lost a couple of starters, I think there's some pretty good players coming back. I know the middle linebacker's a good football player, a big physical guy. I look at their secondary and see a lot of talent back there. And in particular the corners, where I think they go five- or six-deep and all of them are good players.

Q: Which player does your offense need to identify and get blocked every time?

A: To say there's one specific guy . . . we anticipate CU doing a lot of different things defensively. They are going to change their front around and try to give you different looks. And so you're going to have guys shifting and moving and stemming.

Q: Which player or position has pleasantly surprised you most during camp?

A: I think, No. 1, our offensive line is a veteran crew and has played very well through two-a-days and fall camp. And so I've been very pleased with what they've been doing. We look at our quarterback position with Grant Stucker being named the starter. Grant is a very talented young man. . . . Athletically he's the real deal. So, I'll be anxious and excited to see what Grant can do this weekend.

Q: What's the biggest concern about your offense?

A: Well, I think any time you replace starters. We lost a great player in Gartrell Johnson, and the tight end Kory Sperry. And (quarterback) Billy

Farris. You try to find guys to replace them and you want your guys to come in and play well.

Q: What's been the biggest challenge in getting ready for the first game?

A: There hasn't been any problem getting the kids motivated to play. With great respect to Colorado, being an in-state rival, this is a phenomenal game for the state and for both programs with the national exposure that the state gets because of this contest.

CU offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau

Q: What concerns you most about Colorado State's defense?

A: Probably just overall they are very, very aggressive and they play very, very hard. They like to bring a lot of pressure from a lot of different sides. They don't care who they're playing; they play very, very hard.

Q: Which player does your offense need to identify and get blocked every time?

A: No. 6, Mike Sisson is the name. They also have a couple of defensive tackles that are good; big strong kids that we have to keep an eye on, for sure. But Mike is a guy that's going to move around and, I would imagine, give our tackles some problems.

Q: Which player or position has pleasantly surprised you most during camp?

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A: Really, the receivers. Through camp we've really stepped up in the passing game. We've got a couple of vertical guys that can get down the field, and they are doing it and making plays, which is good. (Andre Simmons), the juco kid, he's coming along well. That's been the biggest improvement through camp, the receivers.

Q: What's the biggest concern about your offense?

A: That was the concern (the wide receivers). We put so much time and energy into it during camp, just getting ready. They've really come along well. A lot of the young kids have stepped up. So I'm excited. I can't wait to see what they do



CU junior wide receiver Scotty McKnight will have the full attention of the Rams' defense, says CSU defensive coordinator Larry Kerr. (Dave Weaver, Associated Press file photo)

(tonight).

Q: What's been the biggest challenge in getting ready for the first game?

A: The biggest challenge has just been continuing to grind on our install, and obviously getting into the game plan. Just kind of trying to keep (the players) fresh, keeping them healthy. Really more of those intangible things more than anything. In the game plan they are definitely locked in, they are watching a lot of film, a lot of good teaching going on from our coaches. But really just staying healthy and being smart with our bodies.

Defense: Experienced skill players in focus

CSU defensive coordinator Larry Kerr

Q: What concerns you most about Colorado's offense?

A: Well, I think Colorado has got a proven offensive group of players. They've got experienced quarterbacks, No. 1. Cody Hawkins has played a lot of football and (Tyler) Hansen got an opportunity to start a few games last year. Secondly, they are a year older. They played so many young players last year in the offensive line, and at running back, in particular.

Q: Which player does your defense need to identify right out of the huddle and get stopped?

A: Really, we're preparing for their whole team. There's not one player that we feel we have to

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key on or anything like that. They've got weapons at every position. They've got an excellent receiver coming back, Scotty McKnight. Plus, they've got some newcomers that we're not aware of as much at the receiver position.

Q: Which player or position has pleasantly surprised you most during camp?

A: I think our defensive line has made some great strides. I really feel like we've gotten a lot better in that area. I'm really looking forward to watching those guys play.

Q: What's the biggest concern about your defense?

A: I think its overall depth. We don't have much experience in our backup guys. They have not played a lot of football. They are all young and all new. We're in a developmental stage, especially at linebacker — we're extremely new there . . . a lot of guys playing their first games.

Q: What's been the biggest challenge in getting ready for the first game?

A: They've changed coordinators. Their mantra has been they are going to change their style and be more of a run'em football team. On paper, that makes some sense with their big offensive line and their talented stable of running backs. But, overall, I think you can't buy into a guessing game.

CU defensive coordinator Ron Collins

Q: What concerns you most about Colorado State's offense?

A: Very experienced offensive line. Experienced at the receiver spot. The tailback coming back is a good player and the fullback is a good player. I think they've got a lot of experience. It's their second year in the offense, and we know how much improvement you can get in a year's time.

Q: Which player does your defense need to identify right out of the huddle and get stopped?

A: Oh, sure, (wide receiver) Rashaun Greer is a guy that we're keeping an eye on. We know he's a player and a dang good one.

Q: Which player or position has pleasantly surprised you most during camp?

A: The guy that's stepped up the most this year is (linebacker) Marcus Burton. He's done a great job, starting with last spring. And the guy has just improved every day. So he's a team captain this year. And for all of the things that he's gone through in his career, I think it's a great thing for him. The fact that he's playing as well as he has since he's been here, I think that's a tribute to him too.

Q: What's the biggest concern about your defense?

A: We're young. We have a lot of guys that are going to go out there and haven't had any game experience at all. So this is going to be their first test. They've got to be ready to go.

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Q: What's been the biggest challenge in getting ready for the first game?

A: Well, first there's a fine line between getting them in shape and beating them up. Not cross that line, but get them ready to go. And then, with two weeks of preparation for Colorado State, it's just, not to get dull in terms of your preparation. And to keep sharp every day. So that's been a huge challenge.

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cu football

QB mystery to be solved against Rams

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/06/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — Cody Hawkins or Tyler Hansen? Whomever Colorado quarterback is named the starter for this evening's season opener against Colorado State at Folsom Field, the other said he can handle it.

"It's a big deal to start, I won't deny that, but I'm still young," said Hansen, a sophomore. "I've still got time. There's no rush. But I definitely want to be the starter someday."

Hawkins, a junior and the son of coach Dan Hawkins, said the two quarterbacks are "selfless guys" who want to do what's best for the program.

"We're both comfortable with the situation," Cody Hawkins said, "and I think the team is comfortable with it."

Dan Hawkins has said for two weeks the plan is to wait until game time before publicly announcing the starter. The quarterbacks likely

were informed of the decision by Saturday.

"It's been good for them to have the competition go on like it has," offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said.

Asked to give a status report, Kiesau started with Hawkins: "Cody is extremely intelligent and has a good feel for the game. He's an exceptional leader. Guys look up to him. He's efficient. He's everything you want. He's just not your prototypical, 6-foot-5 quarterback. You just have to get over that and accept that he does a lot of other things probably better than those 6-5 guys. That's what makes him special.

As for Hansen, Kiesau said: "Tyler is obviously more athletic (than Hawkins). He can make things happen. He can scramble around. He's got a great arm. He's smart, as well. He's definitely picking things up."

As for predicting who will start, one school of thought is that CU likely will go with Hawkins because he is more experienced and the safer choice. On the other hand, some say CU will go with Hansen because the coaches already know what they have in Hawkins but may believe Hansen, with his athleticism, has more upside.

Another theory bantered around the water cooler is that because Colorado coaches have said they want to emphasize the running game this season, why not go with the quarterback with the best wheels? If that doesn't work, the more polished passer would be ready to come in for relief.

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In any case, don't look for the duo to alternate by quarters or series. Kiesau said he will not go into the game with a predetermined rotation. Presumably that means if the starter performs admirably, he will play most of the game.

"That's probably the best way to go," Hansen said. "You get more camaraderie with guys on offense and they get more confidence in one guy."

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September 6, 2009

Defense ready for either CU QB

BY KELLY LYELL

KellyLyell@coloradoan.com

CSU players and coaches aren't sure which University of Colorado quarterback they'll see on the other side of the line of scrimmage today.

Coach Dan Hawkins has declined to say whether he'll go with his son, junior Cody Hawkins, or sophomore Tyler Hansen. Both players, he said, are healthy and ready to play.

"I think both of them have done a nice job," Dan Hawkins said. "We're fortunate because we've got two guys that understand the system. They both can make plays, and they're good players."

Larry Kerr, Colorado State University's defensive coordinator, said it really doesn't matter which QB the Buffs use. The Rams, he said, are prepared for either one and expect to see both.

"It really makes absolutely no difference to us," Kerr said. "We're preparing for the CU offense, and they're keying not on a particular quarterback."

Cody Hawkins, 5-foot-11 and 190 pounds, threw for 1,892 yards and 17 TDs a year ago. The 6-1, 200-pound Hansen threw for 280 yards and ran for 261 while playing in just five games and starting two. Neither quarterback stood out over the other during spring drills or through the early stages of fall camp, Dan Hawkins said.

> DELINE IN LINE - The last time CSU won a football game against CU at Folsom Field, brothers Steve and Dave DeLine were kicking against each other. Steve, playing for CSU, got the upper hand, helping his team win the 1986 game 23-7.

Ben DeLine, Steve's son, is a sophomore kicker at CSU who made 4 of 5 field goals last fall while filling in for injured senior Jason Smith. DeLine's first career field goal was a 26-yarder in the third quarter of the opener against CU, cutting the Buffs' lead at the time to 28-17.

> STAYING HOME - CU's game-week roster lists 50 players from Colorado high schools, while CSU's lists 43.

> COACHES - CSU's Steve Fairchild went 7-6 last season, his first as a head coach, and guided his team to a New Mexico Bowl win over Fresno State. CU's Dan Hawkins is 13-24 in three seasons at CU and 105-47-1 in 13 seasons overall.

> EX-BUFF IN BOOTH - The Fox Sports Net broadcast team includes Joel Klatt as one of the analysts in the booth. Klatt was CU's quarterback when the Rams and Buffs last met at Folsom Field in 2005. Klatt guided CU to a 31-28 victory in that game.

> CENTENNIAL CUP - The winner of the CU-CSU game is presented with the Centennial Cup, one of three traveling trophies the Rams play for each season. CSU and Wyoming play for the Bronze Boot, while CSU and Air Force square off for the Ram-Falcon Trophy.

> **SEASON-OPENERS** - CSU is 56-53-1 in season-opening games, while CU is 75-39-1. This is the 11th time in the past 13 seasons the Rams and Buffs have opened the season against one another, and CU has won seven of those games.

> **FAIRCHILD MISSED OUT** - Although CU and CSU have played 80 times in a series that began in 1893, Fairchild never played in a CU-CSU game as a quarterback for the Rams in 1978 and 1980. The Rams and Buffs didn't play at all from 1959 to 1982.

Fairchild was asked this past week if he wishes he could have played against CU.

"That was so long ago, I can't even remember," he said. "Just thinking about it hurts."

> **OUTLYING PARKING** - CU is making additional game-day parking available for \$20 a car (no recreational vehicles or buses allowed) with shuttle-bus service to Folsom Field from a lot on its east campus. To access the lot, take Foothills Parkway from either the Diagonal Highway (Colorado Highway 119) coming from Longmont or the Boulder Turnpike (U.S. Highway 36 coming from Denver) to Colorado Avenue and travel west on Colorado Avenue to Discovery Drive. The parking lot will be on the left side of the street. Shuttle buses will transport fans to the stadium every 10-15 minutes beginning at 1 p.m. The shuttle service also will be available after the game.



September 6, 2009

Second chance: CSU seniors aim to beat their Folsom blues after last-minute 2005 loss

BY KELLY LYELL

KellyLyell@coloradoan.com

Grant Stucker was standing on the sidelines with more than a dozen other redshirt freshmen.

And he remembers all too well the emotional roller-coaster he and the rest of CSU's football players endured in 2005, when the Rams last visited Folsom Field in Boulder. Colorado State University wasted a 21-10 lead, fell behind by a touchdown in the fourth quarter, then rallied to tie the Buffaloes with 36 seconds left on a 9-yard pass from quarterback Justin Holland to tight end Kory Sperry.

CU, however, returned the ensuing squib kick for a 30-yard gain, and led by quarterback Joel Klatt, drove 30 yards to the CSU 30-yard line. The Buffs won the game 31-28 with 4 seconds left on a 47-yard field goal.

"We should have come out of that stadium with a 'W,' and in the last seconds of the game, Mason Crosby kicked a field goal," Stucker said. "I remember it like yesterday. It left a bitter taste in my mouth."

That loss didn't sit well with any CSU player who was there that day and gives them a little more to play for when the Rams and Buffs square off at Folsom this evening in a season-opening game before an expected sellout crowd of 53,750 and a national Fox Sports Net television audience.

The series will move back to Denver, where nine of the past 11 games in a series that dates to 1893 have been played, for 10 years starting next fall, under an agreement announced Monday. This one, though, is in Boulder, where Stucker and CSU's other fifth-year seniors figure they have a score to settle.

"We've talked about it, and we want to make sure we get that one back," said Stucker, a Colorado native and the Rams' starting quarterback.

To get it back, CSU will need steady play from Stucker, a fifth-year senior out of Parker who will be making his first college start, and running backs John Mosure and Leonard Mason, two juniors who second-year coach Steve Fairchild said will share the workload to start the season.

They'll be operating behind the most experienced offensive line in the nation, and Stucker has two standout receivers to turn to in seniors Rashaun Greer and Dion Morton.

CU also has seven starters back on offense, but coach Dan Hawkins won't say if he'll start his son, junior Cody Hawkins, or sophomore Tyler Hansen at quarterback and plans to use four running backs regularly, including last year's leading rusher, sophomore Rodney Stewart. The Buffs also return three starters on the offensive line and another at tight end and have their leading receiver back in junior Scotty McKnight.

Both teams have bigger holes to fill defensively, with CSU replacing six starters, including three of its top four tacklers, and CU replacing seven, including the entire front line in its 4-3 defense.

But the Rams are far more prepared now, at the start of Fairchild's second season, than they were a year ago, when they were still trying to digest new offensive and defensive systems.

"We're awfully excited to play this game and feel like it will be a good barometer for our program to see where we're at," Fairchild said.

CU is coming off a 5-7 season, during which it lost four of its final five games. CSU went 7-6 last season, capping the year with a win over Fresno State in the New Mexico Bowl.

The Buffs have won five of the past six games against CSU and 59 of 80 overall.

"I was there when we lost by a field goal," said CSU tackle Cole Pemberton, a senior from Highlands Ranch. "That definitely hurt. It was my first time in the rivalry, and you don't forget it."

Additional Facts

CSU vs. CU

> **Next up:** CSU at CU, 5 p.m. today, Folsom Field, Boulder.

> **TV/radio:** FSN/KLZ (AM 560), KCOL (AM 600), KOA (AM 850)

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CU Seeking swagger

By Patrick Ridgell
© 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — The Colorado Buffaloes insist they have plenty of confidence today as they begin 2009. No snickering, please.

The Buffs enter this fall determined to turn around the Dan Hawkins' tenure, which is 13-24 through three seasons.

From fielding the Big 12's worst offense, to the embarrassment of losses like 58-0 last October at Missouri, to the pain they felt in the locker room last November when supposedly up-and-coming Nebraska needed one of its luckiest plays ever — a program-record 57-yard field goal by kicker Alex Henery — to beat the Buffs, what can go wrong has gone wrong. And it has hurt.

Expectations are not what they were for this program a decade ago. Few "experts" pick the Buffs, who haven't been ranked since the second week of November 2005, to make much noise in 2009. One ESPN analyst recently observed the Buffs haven't mattered on the national stage since 2002, seven long years ago.

But through all the frustrations and disrespect, the confidence is there, they say. Given the annual challenges the Big 12 presents, the Buffs might need more; they probably need a swagger. Some of them say that's there, too, but their comments are guarded.

"Yeah, definitely," running back Demetrius Sumler said when asked if he sees a swagger. "But there has to be a limit to that. We haven't done anything yet. Potential just means you haven't done anything.

"We got swagger, but we know we haven't proven anything. We still have a lot to prove."

Said defensive end Lagrone Shields: "We feel like this is the year where we don't have any excuses. ... We can't use the young thing anymore. This is the time to step up and show what we can do."

A DIFFERENT ERA

What fans want is what Hawkins discussed upon his arrival in Boulder — things like winning conference titles and Heisman awards. Even in 2006, when his first team started 0-6, he talked confidently about the day that record would be flipped around and his team would be ranked high.



Colorado head coach Dan Hawkins is 13-24 through his first three seasons with the Buffaloes. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

Colorado State (0-0) at Colorado (0-0)

When: Today, 5 p.m.

Where: Folsom Field in Boulder

TV/Radio: TV — FSN. Radio — 760 AM and 560 AM (850 AM will pick up the game in progress after the conclusion of the Colorado Rockies game).

The series: CU leads 59-19-2 and has won five of the past six meetings.

In the spotlight: CU — The quarterbacks: CU refused to announce its starter, but once either Cody Hawkins or Tyler Hansen are under center, eyes will be focused on him.

CSU — QB Grant Stucker: He's mobile but inexperienced. CU should expect some surprises from him.

When CU has the ball: The Buffs

Whether such goals in this era are realistic remains to be seen. The Buffs of 2009 are fighting to keep up with the rest of the Big 12 with their support and facilities. This is not the Colorado Buffaloes of 1990, when Darian Hagan, the current running backs coach, was the quarterback and the Buffs were bad dudes.

Hagan still lights up when asked about his playing days, especially when he talks about the swagger those teams had.

Hagan said when he was a sophomore in 1989, he and his teammates would walk to the center of the field before games and challenge the opponents to come out and meet them. They never did, Hagan said.

To demonstrate the kind of gumption those CU teams had, Hagan has this story: Before one game, CU's offensive line coach, Mike Barry, went around to all of his guys pumping them up. He was hitting and slapping them, yelling, going from one guy to the next. The second time he came upon tackle Mark VanderPoel, VanderPoel hit Barry in the face with his helmet as if to say, "Enough, coach, I'm ready."

It took a lot of audacity for a player to pull something like that, right?

"Absolutely," Hagan said. "We had guys that, you know, were just rambunctious, just guys who believed in themselves."

Hagan said those teams would strut to midfield and challenge opponents because that was coach Bill McCartney's personality. Hawkins' personality is different, Hagan said. But the way Hagan describes it, Hawkins doesn't sound that different.

"We tell them, 'Hey, you have to get after these guys in the run game,'" Hagan said. "Our identity is going to be smash-mouth football. If we play smash-mouth football on offense and get after them on the defense, the games should take care of themselves."

On the other hand, tight end and team captain Riar Geer said the type of mindset that compels a team to challenge another at midfield is not prevalent among the current Buffs.

"Coach Hawkins always preaches to not be the type of guys who are going to be fighters, that get you way too geeked out before games," Geer said. "He wants more of a relaxed focus."

"Getting all geeked up and hyped up before the games is cool, but it seems like a lot of times when you do that, you kind of wear yourself out and you can't last throughout the games."

"We're just blue-collar guys who are going to work hard and give our best every play of the game and hopefully we can come out on top."

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

For those who are curious, here's how Hagan described the current Buffs:

"I would say on offense, it's the same — a quiet swagger," he said. "You have guys who haven't played on the offensive line, but I think those guys are really confident in their abilities."

fielded the Big 12's worst offense in 2009, so today is the beginning of something new. Will it be good? Stay tuned. They want to run the ball, but if they can't pass it, expect a defense that's loaded in the box.

Advantage: Even

When CSU has the ball: The Rams' strength is a big and experienced offensive line. CU is breaking in a new defensive line, but its linebackers and secondary are deep and solid. Advantage: CU.

Special teams: CU kicker Aric Goodman enjoyed another good camp, but it means little until he succeeds in a game. The pressure will be on.

Advantage: CU

Key matchup: The coaches. CSU's Steve Fairchild has ripped his quarterbacks during camp. Are the Buffs buying it?

Prediction: CSU appears to be on the right track with Fairchild, but winning in Boulder with an unproven and inexperienced quarterback is just too tall of a task. CU 21, CSU 14.

Where the "experts" are picking the Buffs to finish in 2009

(Publication: National - Big 12 North)
ESPN.com/ESPN The Magazine: No. 37 - 3rd
Collegefootballnews.com: No. 39 - 4th
Rivals.com: No. 41 - n/a
Phil Steele: No. 42 - 2nd
Athlon Sports: No. 49 - 4th
The Sporting News: No. 51 - n/a
Kickoff: No. 52 - 3rd
Sports Illustrated: No. 55 - 4th
Lindy's Big 12 Football: No. 60 - 4th
College Football Poll.com: No. 68 - 4th
NCAA Football Coommentary: n/a - 1st
Husker Illustrated: n/a - 3rd
Surefire Scouting: n/a - 3rd
Big 12 media summer poll: n/a - 4th
Nationalchamps.net: n/a - 4th
Southern College Sports: n/a - 4th
USA Today Sports Weekly: n/a - 4th
Football Outsiders: n/a - 5th
Game Plan Magazines: n/a - 5th

Source: CU sports information

“Defensively, those guys fly around and you can’t tell them anything. I believe those guys over there play sort of like our guys did.”

How can these Buffs find that sort of confidence?

“Just come out and believe it,” Hagan said. “Just come out and believe you can win, and when you get out there, beat the hell out of people.”

Believing they can do so will be essential. Geer and several of his teammates stressed that preparation keys their confidence. Geer said the “aha” moment came last spring, when he saw the offense executing well during spring drills.

Quarterback Tyler Hansen said he saw it in August camp, when the offense began making plays against a defense he said is going to be “real good.”

Others say they noticed the confidence during summer workouts, especially when guys like linebacker B.J. Beatty started openly discussing the need to have swagger. Others point to when freshmen Derrick Webb and Forrest West recorded their “Colorado Swag” song that’s on YouTube.

“It started escalating from that, and we just build off that,” running back Brian Lockridge said.

“To be honest with you, it was much needed. We needed that swag.”

What almost every Buff remembers is the locker room in Lincoln, Neb., last year. There was a sense among the underclassmen that they had let the seniors down. The loss made CU 5-7, and ended bowl hopes.

Hagan remembers people crying that afternoon. He also remembers seeing players rededicate themselves there.

“I remember it being so sad, so painful,” Geer said.

“I thought to myself, ‘There’s no way he’s making that field goal. I was completely confident we were going to win. And then when he hit it, it just completely blew all the wind I had in my sails.

“After that I realized this is my senior season and I have to get everybody going because the season starts tomorrow. That’s kind of what I did.”

If that dedication works and the Buffs win in 2009, hopes will soar entering 2010. The Buffs are young — there are only 17 seniors on the roster, including 14 on scholarship. They’ll field the youngest offensive line in program history. But the Buffs love that offensive line.

All of the skill players on offense will be back next year. There’s enough depth and talent in the back seven on defense that CU plans to redshirt some freshmen on whom coaches are very high — like cornerback Deji Olatoye and linebacker Liloa Nobriga.

The pieces are in place, they say. Now they just have to do it.

“There’s a lot of confidence and chemistry just because of what we’ve been able to do in practices, carrying over from last spring,” linebacker Marcus Burton said. “We’re a more confident group because we have a lot more experience at a lot of positions, and we’re healthy.

“I think we have a lot more confidence for a lot of reasons.”

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