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interview

Q & A with CU football coach Dan Hawkins

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — In December 2005, Dan Hawkins was considered a "home run hire" by CU officials when he was lured away from Boise State, where he compiled a 53-11 record that included three seasons of 11 or more victories. Success has not followed Hawkins to Colorado, and the clock is ticking.

Athletic directors often consider making staff changes after five seasons if a coach has failed to contend for a conference championship. Entering his fifth year, Hawkins is still looking for his first winning season at CU.

Can he get the program turned around? Hawkins remains upbeat and confident about this team. And the Buffs do return 16 starters — eight on offense, seven on defense and their place-kicker.

Hawkins sat down with Denver Post Colorado beat writer Tom Kensler and talked about his

expectations for the upcoming season.

Q: Is this team finally mature enough to become a winner?

A: "There's much more depth and talent all across the roster. The age factor is better. I like their attitude. Going through a range of experiences, guys realize: 'I've seen the stadiums. I've seen the conference. I've been on TV. I've done all that.' They've been at enough places and bared their teeth to think: 'OK. Enough of that. Now we've got to go here (and win).' I think that is important for individual players. And I also think it's important for a team. There has to be some sort of passion or motivation that drives you to be great. I like these guys a lot. I like the way they're thinking. All that is pointed in the right direction."

Q: There were high hopes last year, and the team finished 3-9. Did you sense players lost confidence after opening with losses to Colorado State and Toledo?

A: "You see it in pro sports: Winning begets winning. And losing begets losing. Particularly when you don't have a well-established culture, that becomes much more rocky. But I don't think our guys ever cashed it in. And they played pretty well late in the season against Oklahoma State and Nebraska, two pretty good teams. It comes down to making a couple of more plays a game and then things start rolling."

Q: What do you anticipate will be some of the

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strengths of this team?

A: "We see this group as being solid. Solid as players. Solid experience-wise. Solid mentality-wise. It should be a very solid situation. You've got some guys that have played and done some good things. And you've got some good players. You have a nice mix of that. It's not that you just have three cornerbacks. You've got five or six. That should be the strength of this thing — just being a pretty solid outfit, all the way around."

Q: What about your concerns?

A: "We've got to get better in the kicking game, obviously. We've got to do a better job of avoiding turnovers. We have to do a better job in the running game, on both sides of the ball."

Q: Which freshmen or redshirt freshmen will have an opportunity to make an immediate impact?

A: "Of the redshirt freshmen, there's kind of an unsung guy but who has a chance to be a pretty good player down the road, and that's offensive lineman David Bakhtiari (6-foot-4, 275 pounds). He's quietly come on. He can move. He's tough. He's smart. He's athletic. . . . We lost some experience at tight end, so DaVaughn Thornton and (converted quarterback) Clark Evans have done some good things. I think (inside linebacker) Derrick Webb is an interesting guy. He's got such a presence to him. He's a striker. Quentin Hildreth (tailback) did some nice things in the spring. And obviously, (safety) Parker Orms

is a guy that's showing up. As for the true freshmen, you'd have to think that because we're a little bit thin at running back, you'd think there would one or two (of the four newcomers) that would have a chance."

Q: Do you anticipate true freshman quarterback Nick Hirschman getting some reps?

A: "We'd like to see Nick get some things done. After this year, we'll lose (Cody) Hawkins, and then it's Nick and Tyler (Hansen) to battle. You'd like to have that third guy play a little bit. That would probably be the smart thing to do. He's a good leader. He's a gym rat. He probably has the best arm on the team. But he has the whole mental part of it down too."

Q: Losing so much experience at linebacker must make a coach feel anxious, if not downright worried. Can departed seniors Jeff Smart, Marcus Burton and Shaun Mohler be replaced inside?

A: "The nice thing is, I think the guys moving in have had a decent amount of playing experience, particularly (senior) Michael Sipili. And Jon (Major) got some playing time last year and then really came on in the spring."

Q: A knee injury and a virus limited your top 2009 recruit, former national top-50 blue-chipper Nick Kasa (defensive end) of Legacy High School, to four games last fall. Is he ready to go?

A: "There's no reason to say he wouldn't. He had a nice spring. He definitely can be a pretty

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prolific play. He's a hard worker and great kid. He's tough, and he's talented. And we need him."

Q: Do you feel snakebit at wide receiver, with the transfer of Markques Simas (after being suspended) being the latest blow?

A: "Maybe we feel a little bit (snakebit). But that being said, (former walk-on) Scotty McKnight has been great, and (Michigan transfer) T-Clem (Toney Clemons) has been awesome. I think Will Jefferson is going to do some good things for us. Others are coming around. You'd love to have some more legs. But some freshmen are coming on, and I think Andre has a chance to do some things."

Q: Andre? You mean Andre Simmons? It's been reported that he likely will be academically ineligible.

A: "He's not out of the mix. We'll see. He's not in the mix. But he's not out of it. He's got some work to do."

Q: Can the staff afford to spend any time paying attention to the Pac-10 this year, considering that conference will be CU's new home in 2011 or 2012?

A: "Not a lot. But you're going to pay attention to a few more things with the Pac-10, whether it's an article or a stat or recruiting. Things are going to register with you a little bit more. But we could be two more years in the Big 12. The other thing is, most of this staff is from that neck of

the woods. We know a lot of those programs. We know a lot of those coaches. We know a lot of those players. We already have a pretty good knowledge of what those teams are doing X's-and-O's wise, how they recruit, where they recruit."

Q: Could you explain your decision to move practices from late afternoon to early morning this year?

A: "A lot of teams are going to it. Oregon does it that way. Northwestern does it. San Jose State does it. Players get up and lift weights at 6:30 a.m. anyway. The other thing is, the balance of classes is in the afternoon. Instructors don't want 8 o'clock classes. Academically, it will give our players many more opportunities to take classes, from late morning to afternoon, all the way to evening classes. The other thing is, the players were fired up about it. They want to get up and go to practice and get it over with so they can get on with their day. And we'll always have daylight on both our practice fields (including the one without lights). All those things made sense. And we're getting a lot of calls from a lot of other people who said they are thinking of doing it."

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Competition at QB

Bufs fans are wondering what is going on with the quarterback situation. Cody Hawkins was

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beaten out for the job midway through the 2009 season but is listed as even heading into fall practice. Dan Hawkins was asked to explain where the competition stands.

"How is that different from the 2009 season? It's never been different. I hope we always have competition at every spot. We have two guys that are good kids, and I think they can both play. They both bring something to the team. Just like last year when we said Cody had a slim margin, maybe the fact is that Tyler has a slim margin now. We haven't handled this situation any differently in any year. These things are not always easy. It's always easier to have one clear guy. But sometimes it doesn't happen that way. Those two are good with the situation. Our team is good with the situation. But it sure makes for good water-cooler discussion."

It comes with the job

Dan Hawkins is heading into his fifth as CU coach and has yet to produce a winning record. Asked if he felt extra pressure to produce this year, Hawkins said:

"No. I've always felt a tremendous amount of pressure to do the right things and to work hard and to continue to strive to get better. When I was a high school coach, I was pretty sure I had an ulcer and didn't sleep much. That's the nature of anybody that wants to be successful, in any walk of life. To me, that's where you feel the pressure. It's not the external stuff."

"I want to win more games like everybody else does. But by and large, you think there's a certain way to do things, and that's the way I'm going to do them. You march down that road, and when it shakes, it shakes. There's a lot of external stuff you can't control. You can only control what's going on with you."

Bufs' schedule

Sept. 4 CSU at Denver Noon MTN
 Sept. 11 At California 1:30 p.m. FSN
 Sept. 18 Hawaii 1:30 p.m. FCS
 Oct. 2 Georgia 2:30 p.m. FSN
 Oct. 9 At Missouri TBA
 Oct. 16 Baylor TBA
 Oct. 23 Texas Tech TBA
 Oct. 30 At Oklahoma TBA
 Nov. 6 At Kansas TBA
 Nov. 13 Iowa State TBA
 Nov 20 Kansas State TBA
 Nov. 26 At Nebraska 1:30 p.m. ABC

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CU football ticket sales down from 2009

Pac-10 news brings boost, but not enough to match last summer

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado season-ticket sales for football surged slightly over the past month, but total sales are still down from the same point last year, athletic director Mike Bohn said.

Bohn attributes increased activity in the ticket office in recent weeks to excitement about the school's future switch to the Pac-10 Conference and the fact that sales generally spike as the football season draws near.

Bohn and his staff budgeted conservatively for the 2010-11 school year, in part, because they anticipated a decline in football ticket sales coming off the program's fourth consecutive losing season. However, the department is optimistic that sales could pick up if the team performs well to start the season in games against Colorado State in Denver on Sept. 4 and at California on Sept. 11.

The first of six home games at Folsom Field will be against Hawaii on Sept. 18.

Coach Dan Hawkins was asked this week if there was any message he could share with fans to help ticket sales for his fifth season leading the program. He said he has "all the faith in the world" CU fans will fill Folsom Field seats and support the Buffs.

"It's important in recruiting and it's important for the team," Hawkins said. "The fans have been really good here. They have. Even in '06 when we had a tough year they were great then."

"The issue you get into is the economy is bad for everybody right now. So everybody is kind of cutting back on everything. I think that is part of it, too. But our kids certainly need the support, our players need the support and the team needs the support."

Hawk on Kiesau's deal

Hawkins called the school's decision to give offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau one of its six multi-year contracts "awesome."

Bohn first pledged to reward Kiesau with more job security during the 2009 offseason when Oregon had offered him a job. The program also lost former offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich and offensive line coach Jeff Grimes to other programs that offseason and Hawkins said he has no doubt Kiesau would have left, too, without the contract offer.

"In terms of keeping him around, that was huge and that was great," Hawkins said. "Hopefully we can evolve to having similar situations across the board because that's just the nature of college athletics and kind of what's going on."

"People have to take care of their families and look at their long-term futures."

Colorado state law limits colleges and universities to six multi-year deals, which are generally used for administrators and head coaches. Assistant coaches in all sports have no real job security, which is often blamed for high turnover rates among assistant coaches in Boulder, especially in the football program.

Notable

Hawkins said he believes his team has had a "very, very good summer." He said strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman has been pleased with the results in the offseason program. ... When asked what areas his team needs to improve most, Hawkins cited improving the turnover ratio, running the ball, stopping the run and being more efficient with the kicking game and limiting penalties. ... The Buffs report for fall camp Aug. 4 and begin practices Aug. 5. ... Hawkins will travel to Big 12 football media days in Dallas next week with senior tackle Nate Solder, senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight and senior cornerback Jalil Brown.

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