



CU vs. CSU: Denver's Invesco Field will be a stadium divided.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



07/28/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: For 2010 Buffs, Game 1 Is Simply THE ONE

IRVING, Texas - Forget last season's loss to Colorado State? Forget that. The Rams' 23-17 season-opening win in Boulder has stuck with the Buffaloes like an 11-month infection. Putting it behind them has been as easy as ditching the IRS.

But this has been self-inflicted misery, pain by design. If those toxic green memories provide what it takes to re-route CU onto a fast track into September and beyond, then the Buffs are going about preparing for the 2010 season opener in the right way.

Their prep work began long before preseason camp opens on Aug.

5. During winter conditioning, the first thing they saw upon entering their practice bubble was a sign reminding them of the 2009 score. If that didn't turn their heads, strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman tossed his whistle during the winter work, instead shouting "green" (CSU's colors are green and gold) to begin or end a drill.

If he screamed another color and players errantly responded, a punishing series of "up-downs" awaited.

Moral: Think green - and not in an environmental sense.

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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"The coaches wanted him to burn green into our heads," senior receiver Scotty McKnight said. "It's all about added motivation and focusing on CSU . . . they took it to us on the field."

Moreover, it happened on Folsom Field, and if it happens at Invesco Field in Denver on Sept. 4 . . . well, the Buffs and their followers say it simply can't be allowed to happen again. For a variety of reasons, the stakes this season are w-a-a-a-y too high.

McKnight succinctly calls this opener "the most important CSU game I've ever been a part of," and he has good reason for making that assessment.

CU needs to start refilling its tank with confidence on Opening Day 2010. The Buffs finished 2009 with the needle stuck on empty. A three-win season (and nine losses) doesn't promote a healthy psyche, not to mention good will in the fan sector. Dan Hawkins' fifth Buffs team needs something good to happen to it - fast.

"Coming off the field last season for the final time, being 3-9 and having that nasty feeling of a failure for a season and also being so close in so many games, you ask yourself what you have to do to get better?" senior cornerback Jalil Brown said. "The seniors and some of the leaders on this team decided we had to get ready for this season (in December). We couldn't wait until the end of the summer."

Added McKnight: "The way things ended last year - it's definitely stuck with us. Getting off on the right foot in an in-state rivalry game, it's everything we're working for and all we talk about is Colorado State, all day every day."

Hawkins, facing a pivotal season as CU enters what likely will be its final act in the Big 12 Conference, contends he and his staff have "always put a huge importance" on CSU. Nonetheless, he has a .500 record (2-2) against the Rams as well as in his season-openers at CU.

The importance of winning Game 1 in any season isn't lost on Hawkins, who told the assembled Big 12 media here Wednesday, "If you win your opener, stats will tell you that win about 70 percent of (the rest) of your games. There's a huge amount of momentum gained and lost in that first game. That's big, really big. Then you put your rival in there and it's even bigger.

"You've got the whole year to prepare for the first game and you put a huge emphasis on it."

But characterizing the opener as a season-maker/breaker isn't always accurate. Even if it was a pretty fair barometer for the Buffs in 2009, it did little to point the Rams in the right direction. After opening 3-0, they lost nine consecutive games to match their rivals' dismal mark.

Also, CU opened 3-0 under Hawkins in 2008 before managing only two more wins in the season's final two months and finishing 5-7. If starting a season with a 'W' heavily outweighs the alternative, it still guarantees nothing.

"Just because you win that game or lose that game, that doesn't a season make," Hawkins said. "That's a certain element to it, but even though the outside world might be overjoyed or depressed, I don't think you can allow that to affect your day-to-day process. You still have to keep going."

I asked McKnight if there was a danger in packing so much emphasis into winning the opener. Of course, there was emphasis on beating CSU in 2009, but the six-point loss sent the Buffs on a downward spiral into Toledo, which embarrassed them 54-38. That game was played on the Friday night after the previous Sunday's loss to CSU, but Hawkins wouldn't say the quick turnaround was a factor.

Back to McKnight and the possible pitfalls of possibly overemphasizing an opening opponent . . . he doesn't believe this one can be overemphasized.

"I don't think so," he said. "I think if guys understand the severity and how important it is, then they'll take it seriously. But, obviously, we've got to worry about ourselves and that's the biggest thing.

"If we stop beating ourselves I think we're going to be a very, very tough team to beat. No matter who we play -

Colorado State, Oklahoma, whoever it is. We've just got to fix things on ourselves."

What's on the fix-it list? "Little things," said McKnight - pass protection by the O-line and running backs, picking up blitzes, receivers running the right routes, etc. Last season offered proof that "little things" done poorly equals huge problems.

Although McKnight remembers enough of the 2009 opener to still taste its disappointment, most of the third and all of the fourth quarter against CSU is a blank tape.

After catching a pass over the middle, he suffered a concussion after "one of the worst hits I've ever had." It came at a critical juncture in the game, with the Buffs driving for what might have been another quick second-half touchdown as they attempted to rally from a 20-3 halftime deficit.

But instead of a reception, the call was overturned after a review and McKnight was saddled with the only fumble of his career. CU's momentum took a gut shot and CSU, limited to a fourth-quarter field goal, held on.

McKnight recalls having no recollection of anything after the helmet-to-helmet collision: "I remember some of what happened in pregame, then my parents being at my house that night," he said.

Since then, though, he's seen enough tape of the game to fill in the hard-to-watch gaps. If the video doesn't take him all the way back and underscore what the loss did to CU's season, buds such as Brown are there to rewind it all for him.

The Buffs are 6-5 in their most recent 11 games against the Rams. "Obviously, it's not a walk in the park," Brown said. "We've got to take it seriously."

Maybe more seriously than ever.

QB NON-UPDATE: No proclamations for the conference media; the QB situation remains status quo. But Hawkins did say that junior Tyler Hansen had a "slight edge" coming out of spring drills and entering August camp. He then added that Hansen's competition with senior Cody Hawkins remains close: "Really on any given day, you could probably split them with a razor . . ."

Naming a No. 1 likely will come after "a couple of scrimmages . . . a couple of weeks out" from the opener, Hawkins said. "It's very tough to get through a season with one guy . . . good chance we'll need them both."

However, in several interviews Tuesday, McKnight said Hansen has taken most of the summer 7-on-7 snaps with the No. 1 offense and appears to be on track to be named the starter.

CALL IT THE EXIT BOWL: CU ends the 2010 season at Nebraska with its traditional day-after-Thanksgiving game on Nov. 26. It could be the end of the road for the Buffs-Cornhuskers series. CU is exiting the Big 12 for the Pac-12, Nebraska for the Big Ten. Both schools likely will begin competition in their new leagues in 2011.

McKnight, for one, will miss playing the Huskers: "That's probably the (Big 12) game I'd miss most. It's huge. It's been a great rivalry, a great series, for us. It's one I'll always remember."

SMELL, SMELL: The oddest Big 12 media day question, in the CU seniors' opinion, came from ESPN, which wanted to know "what game day smells like."

OK . . . but was the reference to the Game Day set, the Game Day talent (apologies to Fowler, Herbstreit and Corso) or, well, game day itself anywhere across the land?

It was the latter, and the intrepid Buffs trio offered variations on the theme of freshly cut stadium grass, with left tackle Nate Solder also musing, "Sweat? Hot dogs? I don't know."

Can't wait to see how that's worked in some Saturday morning.

NO MAGIC NUMBER: Hawkins, who is 16-33 in four seasons at CU, was asked if he believes he needs a certain number of wins this fall to remain employed.

"No, and I don't every worry about that, I really don't," he answered. "I was down in the Rangers locker room (Tuesday) and their No. 1 goal is not to worry about winning or losing. Again, it's chasing this personal excellence and if you can do that in your life, you're going to be the very best you can be. And the rest of it you can't really control."

HAWK A PAC-10 FAN? Not so much - at least in his younger years.

"I grew up in the sticks (Fall River Mills, Calif) in the era of three TV stations and PBS," he said. "The (college) game of the week might be Oklahoma-Nebraska . . . it wasn't always Pac-10. Even though I was in California, I was seven hours from Eugene and probably close to that from Cal. I didn't go to a lot of Pac-10 games."

BUFF BITS: To speed up the assimilation process, CU's seniors invited USC transfer Travon Patterson to a seniors' barbeque Wednesday night at Pitman's house. Hawkins called Patterson, a receiver, "very explosive . . . he's played some snaps against some great competition. He'll help us." . . . Hawkins isn't voting this season in the *ESPN/USA Today* coaches' poll . . . Solder, a *Playboy* preseason All-America pick, believes the Buffs "are going to bring it every week, no matter what happens. I kind of feel that every win we get is going to be a bonus."

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs' Scotty McKnight tired of losing

Bufs receiver says he wants wins more than school records

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 07/28/2010 08:29:39 PM MDT



IRVING, Texas -- Scotty McKnight would give it all back for more wins.

Take away the catches, the yards, the touchdowns, the records, the notoriety. Heck, take away his playing time, too. Sure, that would hurt. It would be tough to watch from the sidelines, but the Colorado wide receiver would do it if it meant more victories, less drama and more fun for teammates and coaches during his career.

McKnight needs three receptions to become the Buffs' all-time leading pass catcher. He will start his senior season with 165 career receptions, two behind former Buff Michael Westbrook. He needs 649 receiving yards and six touchdown catches to become the all-time leader in those categories as well.

He wants those records, but he wants to win much more.

McKnight doesn't care to be remembered as one of the best players in the history of the Colorado football program who just didn't win much. In a moment of brutal honesty Wednesday during interviews at Big 12 Conference football media days, he admitted he gave some thought during the offseason to the idea that his legacy might be headed in that direction if the Buffs can't produce the first winning season during his five years at the school, which also have been coach Dan Hawkins' years at the helm.

CU fans even have made the point to him in casual conversations.

"There is a connotation there," McKnight said. "They will be like, 'OK, you've been here for three years and you've done this, but you guys haven't won a lot of games.' I understand that. It's totally understandable. You want a guy who has won a lot of games to be the base of that record. I want to win so we get the best of both worlds. So people will be like, 'Yeah, that guy is at the top, and he was a part of a great team his senior season.'"

Optimism reigns at this time of year. McKnight knows it all too well. After months of early morning runs, weightlifting, seven-on-seven work and film study, players and coaches can't help but feel good about the work they have put in and their chances for success in the coming season.

McKnight found himself saying familiar sentences Wednesday about how this offseason has been the best for the program during his time in it. He provided familiar reasons explaining why he truly believes it.

More dedication, less complaining, better chemistry.

Then he pointed out, completely on his own, how he understands that the Buffs have said all these things in the past without coming through with results when it matters. Yet, his gut is telling him this is the year. Things feel different.

"The difference between this season is that we have a lot of older guys who I think are so sick of losing football games, and when you go back and look at the film on why we lost, we beat ourselves, every game," he said. "We should have won so many more games, but it comes down to we get an offsides penalty here, we get a holding penalty, we turn the ball over..."

McKnight has caught a pass in every game of his college career. It's a streak of 37 consecutive contests, including the 2007 Independence Bowl. No other player in the nation carries a longer streak into the 2010 season, according to the CU sports information department.

"I'm not going to lie and say it's not something I have thought about," McKnight said of his chance to leave CU as one of its most accomplished players on a personal level. "It drives me. I've looked at it to see where I need to be and what kind of season I have to have to kind of put myself in position to be in front of all those categories. That's something I think any player in my position would strive for.

"But for me, I don't care about it as much as winning. It's something cool that I think when I look back on it, if I do, in fact, pass all those guys on that list in terms of catches and yards and all that stuff, it's going to be really cool when I'm older, but it won't mean as much if we're losing these games."

It's odd that a player with his credentials would wake up every day this summer and talk to himself about losses, about how he and his teammates are perceived as not being able to get the job done. He envisions it all and then heads out to do something about it. He said he isn't the only Buff motivated in that way.

"I think everyone is kind of embracing that," he said. "It's not acceptable to lose."

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Despite hardships, CU's Dan Hawkins loves his job

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 07/28/2010 11:06:36 PM MDT



IRVING, Texas -- It's been a tough 12 months for Colorado coach Dan Hawkins, but he's still in love with coaching.

It started last summer when Hawkins went to the emergency room with kidney stones and continued into the season with his team struggling to a 3-9 finish. Questions about his job security dogged him last fall and have continued to a lesser extent through the offseason.

On the cusp of another training camp and another season, his 27th in coaching, Hawkins has had no trouble keeping his challenges in perspective. There is a war being fought, an oil spill disrupting lives in and around the Gulf of Mexico and a tough economy. Many have it far worse than him.

Hawkins remains passionate about his profession.

"Totally," Hawkins said. "It's all about the challenge. I love being with these guys.

"... I love being with the players, love being with the coaches, love the competition, love the strategy, love all that."

Chemistry wins

One of the interesting exchanges between Hawkins and a reporter Wednesday during Big 12 Conference media days came when the coach was asked to identify the strength of his team. Hawkins pointed to the chemistry in the locker room.

"I really think that's the best thing we've got," Hawkins said.

Hawkins said if there is one area in his depth chart he would be most comfortable identifying as a strength it would be the secondary where he has two fifth-year cornerbacks returning in Jalil Brown and Jimmy Smith along with talented safeties

Anthony Perkins and Ray Polk. Those players are backed up by plenty of exciting young depth.

"All those guys are good players and they're back and they've played a lot," Hawkins said. "Probably in terms of just pure football-wise, it's there."

Patterson in place

Wide receiver Travon Patterson, a transfer from USC who is eligible to play this season, is working out with his new teammates and getting acclimated to Boulder after switching schools in the last week. Hawkins was able to comment about him for the first time Wednesday.

"He's got some speed. He's very explosive," Hawkins said. "He just showed up the other day. We obviously can't do a lot with him right now, but he's play some snaps and played against great competition and he'll help us."

Patterson is a senior who needs just a few credits to graduate, though he won't get his degree from CU. He will likely transfer his grades from CU back to USC after the fall semester and receive his degree there. He was able to transfer and be eligible because the NCAA placed USC on probation for two years this summer.

Pac-12 recruiting bump

Hawkins said there hasn't been much of tangible change in interest from recruits on the heels of Colorado's decision to move to the Pac-12 Conference in either 2011 or 2012.

"There has been less chatter about it than you would really think," he said.

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Cody Hawkins or Tyler Hansen? Dan Hawkins undecided on CU Buffs' QB

McKnight says Hansen leading Buffs in summer drills

By **Kyle Ringo**, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 07/28/2010 12:10:30 PM MDT



IRVING, Texas — Nine months ago, Colorado coach Dan Hawkins said if he had it to do over again he would not have brought his son, Cody, to Boulder to play quarterback.

With a week remaining before the start of fall camp, Hawkins is once again faced with the possibility of naming his son the starter.

During interviews at Big 12 Conference football media days Wednesday, Hawkins once again said he doesn't see much difference between junior Tyler Hansen, who started the final seven games of last season, and Cody Hawkins, who is a senior this fall and has played in more than 30 games at CU.

Hawkins said he hopes to choose a starter midway through camp after several scrimmages. The fact that his son might not be a popular pick among fans won't enter into the decision.

"We're not going to base our judgments on that," Hawkins said. "We're not going to base our judgments on, you know, if our staff decides that Tyler is the guy, he's the guy. If they decide (running back Brian Lockridge) is the guy or whoever is the guy, that's the guy."

"You're not going to sway that one way or the other based off of who the kid is. We're going to play whoever we can play who is going to give us the best chance to win. You just can't control the outside stuff."

This is the second straight year Colorado has entered camp with questions about who will start under center and Hansen replaced Hawkins as the starter briefly in the 2008 season as well. The Buffs are not alone in the Big 12 in not knowing who the starter will be at quarterback, but Hawkins acknowledged he would like to know the answer to the question before camp.

"It's like the rest of life," Hawkins said. "The goods and bads. The good is you've got guys. You've got guys you can believe in. You've got guys who can play. The bad thing is you'd rather have one guy be clear front and center, but it's not that way."

While Hawkins sees competition being close heading into fall camp, that sentiment isn't necessarily echoed by players who have been participating in seven-on-seven workouts all summer.

Senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight said both quarterbacks are capable of leading the team this fall, but he expects Hansen to be under center when the Buffs face Colorado State on Sept. 4.

"He's taken all the reps with the ones this summer," McKnight said. "He's run all the player-run practices. He's taken that leadership role on and guys have really accepted it and they love it. He's one of those guys who has played well in games and he's been a tough kid whether it's diving for a first down or whatever it is. People react well to Tyler."

"He's kind of transitioned himself this offseason from being a running quarterback who has a good arm to now he knows his reads, he knows the protections, the defenses and all of that. All the different things that go into being a quarterback. He's gotten so much better. He's more of a pocket passer who also now has the ability to elude defenses and run.

"I've seen so much growth in Tyler over the summer. It's been huge."

Dan Hawkins has talked about his son becoming a coach after his playing career ends, but he ruled out the possibility that Cody Hawkins could remain at CU next season as a member of the coaching staff or graduate assistant.

"I think, for him, he wants to take a year or so to do something, whatever it is," Hawkins said.

Hawkins, who came to Colorado from Boise State after the 2005 season, was asked plenty of questions about his former program, which is expected to be ranked among the top five teams, if not the top two, in the nation to start the season. Hawkins, meanwhile, is still looking for his first winning season with the Buffs. He was asked if he ever had buyer's remorse in leaving Boise State for CU.

Hawkins said he has built every program he has been a part of into a winner and moved on. He said he came to CU because it was the right decision for him at the right time in his life, despite some of his peers and friends warning against it.

"When you live the life, you've got to get outside your comfort zone," Hawkins said. "Every experience brings something to the table. I mean, we were city champs at Christian Brothers High School. I could have stayed there forever.

"I could have stayed at Siskiyous forever. I could have stayed at Willamette forever. I could have stayed at Boise forever. ... For me, you don't make those decisions based on, 'Am I going to make more money?' I came to Colorado because I said, 'Okay, this is going to be a great test. This going to be a great chance for me to ply my trade at this place based on these circumstances.' That's why you go."

One of the most common questions asked of CU players throughout the day concerned their desire to win games to save their coach's job. Hawkins also faced questions about his job security. They are questions he has been answering since early last season.

"I don't ever worry about that," he said. "We were down in the Rangers' locker room and their No. 1 goal is not worrying about winning or losing. It's all about chasing personal excellence and if you can do that in your life, you're going to be the very best you can be. The rest you can't control."

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Longmont, Colorado
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Third and two

CU will go with quarterback tandem once more

By

© 2010 Longmont Times-Call

IRVING, Texas — Let the quarterback controversy continue.

For the third year in a row, the University of Colorado football team will go into the season unable to decide between Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen for the starting job under center. And head coach Dan Hawkins continues to answer questions about the unsettled position.

On Wednesday during Big 12 media day, Dan Hawkins fielded several questions about his Buffaloes, including his ever-changing quarterback situation.

“It’s like the rest of life — the goods and bads,” said Hawkins, whose team will report for fall camp Aug. 4. “The good is you’ve got guys. You’ve got guys you can believe in. You’ve got guys who can play. The bad thing is you’d rather have one guy be clear front and center, but it’s not that way.”

Cody Hawkins, Dan’s son, has started 28 games in the past three years. He’s the program’s all-time leader in touchdown passes (46) — but also the all-time leader in interceptions (36). Cody, however, lost the starting job last season to Hansen, who started the final seven games. Hansen threw for 1,440 yards and eight touchdowns and is better than Cody Hawkins at making plays with his feet. But Hansen doesn’t have the experience Cody Hawkins has, and he has to improve his accuracy.

Hansen came out of spring ball atop the depth chart.

“I think we’re very blessed,” coach Hawkins said. “We’ve got two really good kids. Really on any given day, you could probably split them with a razor hair.

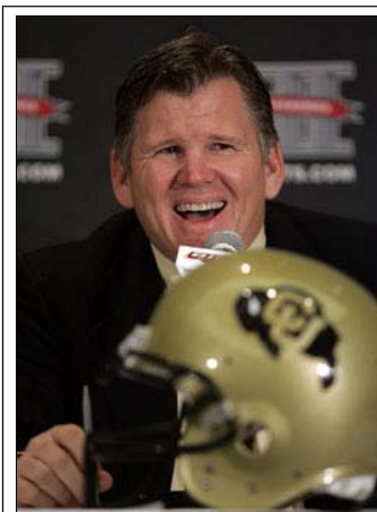
“I think Tyler probably had a little bit of an edge coming out of spring ball. But it’s very tough to get through a whole season with one guy anyway. Good chance we’re going to need both of those players.”

Coach Hawkins said the emphasis for the Buffs is on the team, not any individual. And he said he doesn’t believe the players care which quarterback starts.

As for which player will start, coach Hawkins still isn’t sure.

“I think we’ll probably get through a couple of scrimmages there and give everybody really a chance to kind of compete and get going,” he said. “Then as you get two weeks out (from the season opener, Sept. 4 against Colorado State) ... you kind of want to make sure that you kind of hone in on that.”

READY TO GO: Dan Hawkins is coming into his fifth season with the Buffs, and so far he has struggled, going 16-33. Still, he said he can’t wait to get this season going.



MILES TO GO: Oklahoma running back DeMarco Murray wants to do something no Sooner has done: rush for 2,000 yards. B2

Times-Call file

“It seems like the older I get, the sooner I get fired up,” he said. “It always seems about July time you’re ready to go and champing at the bit. I have a great bunch of guys I’m excited about being around and coaching.”

Part of Hawkins’ excitement stems from a “very productive” spring and an offseason of workouts that he said was “probably better than we’ve ever had before.”

NOT LOOKING AHEAD: The Buffs still have not decided whether to leave the Big 12 for the Pac-10 in 2011 or 2012. Either way, coach Hawkins said he isn’t looking that far down the road.

“We’re very focused on the Big 12, and really, more importantly, we’re focused on Colorado State,” he said, referring to the season opener.

INSPIRATION: On Tuesday night, Hawkins and the three players he brought to Irving — cornerback Jalil Brown, wide receiver Scotty McKnight and tackle Nate Solder — had a chance to go the Texas Rangers baseball game and talk with the Rangers, who are running away with the American League West Division title.

A year ago, the Rangers finished 10 games out of first.

“I asked them ... ‘What’s been the biggest difference between last year and this year?’” Hawkins said. “It has been — it’s just been a few little things. For us, that’s been the whole concept.”

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CU Buffs' sleepers turn out to be keepers

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 07/29/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

IRVING, Texas — If Colorado coach Dan Hawkins had as much luck with his blue-chip signees as he has had with his lesser-regarded recruits, the Buffaloes might be riding high. Instead, Hawkins is on the hot seat heading into his fifth season.

Through his first four years, none of which has resulted in a winning season, up seems to be down, and down seems to be up when projecting what CU recruits will do. Hawkins has gotten little or no production from some of his highest-rated recruits, including tailback Darrell Scott, linebacker Lynn Katoa and wide receiver Markques Simas.

On the other hand, former walk-on Scotty McKnight stands just three catches from becoming CU's all-time receptions leader, and CU's two-deep is full of formerly unheralded prospects, including 5-foot-6, 175-pound tailback Rodney Stewart, the team's leading rusher the last two seasons.

"I'm not totally down on the star system, but it doesn't mean that it's the end-all," Hawkins said Wednesday at the Big 12 football media days. "I don't think you just open up whatever service and go: 'OK. Let's just go and get those guys.'

"I think there's a package in total that you have to look at — particularly for us in Colorado, in terms of the kind of student, as well as the kind of player. When you're evaluating, there's a lot of things that people bring to the table. It doesn't matter at what level. There are more things than just the tangible parts to it.

"Do those matter? Sure they do. That doesn't mean that a guy who's a five-star player is bad. I just think you have to look at the whole package."

Colorado, coming off a 3-9 disaster season, brought three seniors to media days: McKnight, offensive tackle Nate Solder and cornerback Jalil Brown. Coming out of high school, each was regarded more sleeper than keeper.

McKnight, from Coto de Caza, Calif., had scored a scholarship offer from Boise State. But when Hawkins left Boise State

for Colorado, the best McKnight could get was "preferred walk-on" offers from CU and several Pac-10 schools. That meant McKnight had to pay his way to school.

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Unheralded junior running back Rodney Stewart, left, has led the Buffs in rushing the last two seasons. (Sue Ogrocki, Associated Press)

Hawkins put McKnight on scholarship after he caught 43 passes as a freshman.

"I always had confidence when I played, but I didn't know (success) would come this fast or it would turn out this way," McKnight said Wednesday. "I knew I didn't have the physical attributes that would scream 'five-star recruit.' But I just felt that I worked as hard as I could I'd find a way."

Now 5-feet-11 and 185 pounds, McKnight lacked the size and speed that catch the eye of major-college recruiters. Even his boyhood friendship with University of Southern California-bound quarterback Mark Sanchez didn't help.

"I thought if I could learn the mental aspect and grab the reins on that, I thought in some way I'd help the team and go to a great school,"

McKnight said. "I thought things would probably work out in the long run. But I can't say I came into school thinking I'd turn out this successful."

CU recruiters spotted McKnight's work ethic and soft hands.

"(McKnight) really gets in and out of his breaks," Hawkins said. "He's showing up on a lot of (NFL) scouts' radar."

Brown played running back and safety for South Mountain High School in Phoenix, where he attracted little recruiting interest, though he rushed for 1,910 yards as a senior.

Under Arizona rules, Brown was allowed to play football for South Mountain while being home-schooled.

"I got a good education, but I think that (home schooling) hurt me," he said Wednesday. "Recruiters would come to the school, but my grades weren't there; they couldn't see them."

"Coming out of high school, I felt like I had the athletic ability and the mind-set to play at the next level. It was just having somebody to find that and believe in me as well. Fortunately, Colorado said I had what they were looking for in a cornerback."

Solder, meanwhile, was the most highly recruited of the trio. A native of Denver, but having grown up in Buena Vista, he was rated No. 35 nationally by Rivals.com — as a tight end. But Oklahoma or

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UCLA didn't exactly come calling. Now a 6-9, 310-pound offensive tackle, Solder also earned scholarship offers from Colorado State and Wyoming.

Had he turned down CU's offer to play football, he was going to try basketball at Dartmouth.

"I really considered Dartmouth, but couldn't afford it," said Solder, referring to Ivy League schools not offering athletic scholarships. "But coming to Colorado turned out to be the best decision."

If Solder excels as a senior, he's expected to draw attention from NFL scouts because of his size and athletic ability. He once ran a 4.8 for 40 yards as a CU tight end.

"My mind-set coming from high school was just that I was going to give it my best shot; I had no idea what I was coming into," Solder said Wednesday. "It's been a circumstance of a bit of luck, a bit of faith and the coaches. I worked hard, and it's just worked out that way."

Colorado fans must wonder how the team would have fared last year if Scott, Katoa and other former blue-chippers had come through.

"Things happen," Brown said. "Guys leave because they want more playing time. Or they get hurt. Or they can't play for a coach. You get in trouble. Guys get homesick. It's tough to keep anybody around."

"It's tough on five-star guys because they have so much to try to back up. When you come as a two-star, it's not very hard, because all you can do is improve. If you're a five-star, everybody's eyes are on you to immediately play like a five-star."

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

Recruiting pattern: More success with sleepers than blue-chippers

CU coach Dan Hawkins has had more luck with so-called "diamonds in the rough" than he has with four- and five-star blue-chip recruits. Some examples:


SLEEPER SURPRISE A recruited walk-on, McKnight has 165 career catches and needs just three more to surpass Michael Westbrook as the school's all-time leader in receptions. Rated No. 165 among prep wideouts by Phil Steele's college football magazine.

WR Scotty McKnight, 5--11, 185, Sr., Coto de Caza, Calif. —

TB Rodney Stewart, 5-6, 175, Jr., Columbus, Ohio — Rated a two-star recruit by recruiting gurus, Stewart beat out five- star recruit Darrell Scott for the starting job in 2008 as a true freshman. Stewart has led CU in rushing past two seasons.

CB Jalil Brown, 6-1, 205, Sr., Phoenix — Played

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THE DENVER POST

running back and safety in high school and like Stewart was rated just a two-star prospect. Last fall he earned all-Big 12 honorable mention honors from the league's coaches.

DE Forrest West, 6-1, 260, Soph., Canton, Conn. — Another two-star recruit, West made an immediate impact last fall as a true freshman. He got in for 192 plays and recorded 10 tackles, including one for a loss. He also had two quarterback pressures.

C Keenan Stevens, 6-2, 290, Sr., Monument — A walk-on from Lewis-Palmer High School, Stevens jumped past Mike Iltis (originally a three-star recruit) to claim a spot in the starting lineup. Coaches love his tenacity.

BLUE-CHIP BAD LUCK Rated a consensus five-star recruit and the nation's top tailback prospect in 2008 by Rivals.com, Scott never gained traction at CU. Dogged by injuries and lacking fundamentals, he netted 95 rushing yards as a sophomore last fall before quitting the team.

TB Darrell Scott, 6-1, 220, Ventura, Calif. —

LB Lynn Katoa, 6-1, 225, Salt Lake City — Rivals.com rated Katoa the nation's No. 2 linebacker prospect in 2008. A Parade All-American, Katoa never took a snap at CU. After enrolling early, he was involved in an off-campus fight and was suspended by the university. Katoa failed to regain his eligibility and left school before last season.

WR Markques Simas, 6-3, 225, San Diego —

One of the top receiving prospects along the Pacific Coast, Simas arrived as a four-star recruit in 2007. But he redshirted that season and then became academically ineligible in 2008. After a two-game suspension last fall, Simas caught 43 passes for 585 yards, including six or more receptions in the last four games. But an offseason DUI charge led to a suspension by coach Dan Hawkins, and Simas left the program.

LB Jon Major, 6-1, 225, Soph., Parker — Major

arrived at CU from Ponderosa High School in 2008 as a heralded Parade All-American. He impressed early in August drills but suffered a season-ending knee injury with a torn ACL before the first game. Still not fully recovered last fall, Major played in six games, recording 13 tackles. He is said to be at full speed heading into fall camp and is expected to contend for a starting job.

DE Nick Kasa, 6-6, 275, Soph., Thornton —

Rated a four-star recruit out of Legacy High, Kasa initially gave an oral commitment to the Florida Gators before switching to CU. Kasa was expected to make an immediate impact as a true freshman last fall but suffered a partially torn MCL knee injury midway through August drills and later was sidelined by a virus. He played just 47 snaps in four games, but big things are expected this season from him as a pass rusher.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

JULY 28, 2010, 11:47 AM

CU players peppered with questions about Pac-10

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

IRVING, Texas — Colorado's three player representatives — cornerback [Jalil Brown](#)^[1], wide receiver [Scotty McKnight](#)^[2] and offensive tackle [Nate Solder](#)^[3] — couldn't turn around Wednesday during [Big 12](#)^[4] football media-day interviews without being asked about CU's impending move to the [Pac-10](#)^[5].

The trio thought that was a bit odd, considering that each is a senior and will have completed their eligibility before CU begins a [Pac-10](#)^[5] schedule, likely next fall.

But they played along with the questioning.

"One of the reasons I decided to go away to college was to experience new things," McKnight said. "I got that. I got to play in states like Texas and [Oklahoma](#)^[6] and [Kansas](#)^[7] and [Nebraska](#)^[8] — places where college football is everything to those people.

"So going to places I'd never seen before and learning about new teams and new traditions and cultures, that was a great growing experience for me.

"And then when I'm done with college, all my boys back home went to [Pac-10](#)^[5] schools, so we can all root against each other and have fun with that. It's perfect for me."

Brown, a native of Phoenix, said playing in the [Big 12](#)^[4] has been "amazing."

"It was great to play against teams like [Oklahoma](#)^[6], [Nebraska](#)^[8], Texas," Brown said. "You hear about big-time football programs and those were the ones I was playing against.

"But like with Scotty, the move to the [Pac-10](#)^[5] will make it easier for me to see the Buffs play after I'm out of college, me being from Arizona. It's great."

More from All Things Colorado Sports

- [Hawkins wasn't Pac-8 fan](#)^[9]
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- [Solder: CU's experienced O-line a key](#)^[13]

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- [Helton looks "very, very good" but questions remain](#) (All Things Rockies)
- [Is it time to be concerned about Helton's back?](#) (All Things Rockies)

All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

JULY 28, 2010, 11:30 AM

Solder: CU's experienced O-line a key

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

IRVING, Texas — It's hard to believe that Colorado is the only [Big 12](#)^[1] team to return all five starters on the offensive line, considering that in 2007 the Buffs had only six available offensive linemen for spring drills.

Senior offensive tackle [Nate Solder](#)^[2] (6-feet-9, 315 pounds) and junior guard [Ryan Miller](#)^[3] (6-8, 310) were voted to the preseason all-[Big 12](#)^[1] first team in a poll of the league's coaches.

"When you have that experience coming back it gives you confidence that the guys you're playing are the best guys," Solder said Wednesday during [Big 12](#)^[1] football media-day interviews. "The consistency comes from the fact that you're playing with the same guys every day ... when you have different guys it can become jumbled."

More from All Things Colorado Sports

- [Hawkins went to weddings](#)^[4]
- [Hawkins still has expectations](#)^[5]
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[3] Ryan Miller: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/sports/tag/ryan-miller/>

[4] Hawkins went to weddings: http://blogs.denverpost.com/sports/2010/07/28/hawkins-went-to-weddings/11475/?source=ARK_sports

[5] Hawkins still has expectations: http://blogs.denverpost.com/sports/2010/07/28/hawkins-still-has-expectations/11483/?source=ARK_sports

All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

JULY 28, 2010, 10:55 AM

CU's McKnight humbled by receiving mark

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

IRVING, Texas – Who could have imagined that a former walk-on, senior receiver Scotty McKnight, would need just two receptions to join Michael Westbrook as Colorado's all-time leading receiver?

Even McKnight has to pinch himself at times.

"I didn't think it would happen," he said Wednesday during Big 12 football media days. "To be in the same category as some of the great CU receivers like Westbrook and (Charles) Johnson, it's big time."

After catching 76 passes as a junior, McKnight enters this fall with 165 grabs. Three catches would put McKnight all alone at the top. Westbrook snagged 167 passes in the early 1990s.

Barring an injury, it should not take McKnight long to get the record. He has caught at least one pass in each of his 37 games at CU, including the 2007 Independence Bowl.

"It will mean a lot," McKnight said of becoming CU all-time receptions leader. "I don't want to lie and say it's not a great honor. I think it's great, it's awesome.

"It's something that I think when I'm older I'll look back on and think that it's something really special that I did.

"But for now, I'm really focused on us winning that first game (Sept. 4 against Colorado State at Invesco Field at Mile High). That's going to be huge for us, to get us off to the right foot."

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-30-

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JULY 28, 2010, 12:32 PM

Cody Hawkins likely to coach, but not Colorado

By [JOHN HENDERSON](#) |  1 Comment

[1]

[Cody Hawkins](#)^[2] during a player-run practice earlier this month. (Leah Mills, The Denver Post)

IRVING, Texas — Entering his last year of college football, [Cody Hawkins](#)^[2] again finds himself fighting for the starting quarterback job. He won't find himself on any NFL scout's radar, but hopes to land on a college coach's.

Just not his dad's.

[Dan Hawkins](#)^[3] said his son wants to go into coaching but will not be a graduate assistant for him next year. In fact, Cody may not coach anywhere next year.

"I don't think he wants to jump into it right away," Dan said. "He knows what a grind that is. He wants to take a year or so to do something, whatever it is and then get into it.

"Some guys go to Europe. He's talked to different people about doing some jobs with them. He's talked about going somewhere and volunteering at a high school. He's talked about doing the sleeping bag thing at the NFL. He knows, either way, when he gets into it he's not going to have another life."

All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

JULY 29, 2010, 1:16 PM

Las Vegas Bowl eyes CU, Utah as Pac-12 entries

By **NATALIE MEISLER** |  1 Comment

If Colorado or Utah finish bowl eligible in their initial [Pac-10](#)^[1] efforts, both already have the attention of one bowl game.

The Maaco [Las Vegas](#)^[2] Bowl pairs the first pick of Mountain West teams (after any BCS invitations) with a fourth or lower (depending on the year) [Pac-10](#)^[1] selection.

BYU has made the bowl a permanent home. If the BYU-Utah regular season rivalry is sacrificed when Utah moves to its new home, the bowl won't have trouble reviving it.

Tina Kunzer-Murphy, long-time executive director of the bowl, said bowl officials also believe CU fans would travel well, with the possibility of some early winter golf.

Kunzer-Murphy was one of the bowl reps at the [MWC](#)^[3] Football Media Day this week. The Independence Bowl is the newcomer to the [MWC](#)^[3]'s bowl lineup this season.

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YOU ARE HERE Now at the podium: Colorado

Now at the podium: Colorado

By **Kellis Robinett** - Posted on **28 July 2010**

Few teams have been willing to openly speak their mind on Colorado and Nebraska leaving the Big 12 Conference this week.

But the Buffaloes at least were willing to say they will miss the Big 12 on Wednesday.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins and his players all agreed they will sincerely miss the Buffs' rivalry game with Nebraska. And offensive lineman Nate Solder said it will be hard for him to say goodbye to the Big 12 North.

"There is always so much to play for in those games," Solder said.

"The Nebraska game is always huge," added Scotty McKnight. "I'm gonna miss that one a ton."

But McKnight didn't stop there. As he continued to talk with reporters, he said he will miss the entire Big 12. He always liked going to Austin and playing in the Longhorns' huge stadium. Then he would contrast that to traveling to Manhattan and playing in a more intimate setting.

It gave the conference wide diversity that he will always appreciate.

Moving forward, Hawkins said he would consider scheduling Big 12 teams for nonconference games. But he isn't sure yet what future schedules will look like.

"I don't think anyone really knows right now the way it's going to be," Hawkins said. "Haven't spent a lot of time thinking about the what ifs. For us it's the schedule this year and more importantly the Rams in the opener."

Yes, Hawkins spent a lot of time talking about that rivalry game with Colorado State. Last year, the Buffs lost that game and then were hammered by Toledo.

The 10-win season he hoped to deliver was an impossibility, and Hawkins was left to answer questions about his job status for the next several months.

He was asked again about that on Wednesday. Does he know how many wins he needs to record to save his job?

"No," he said, "and I don't even worry about that."

But his expectations are once again high.

"Our expectations are always very high," Hawkins said. "I don't know how you could go into a season without high expectations ... For us, it's always about chasing excellence."

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Slimmer Murray sets big goals

BY [AUSTIN MEEK](#)

July 28, 2010 - 3:16pm

IRVING, Texas — Oklahoma's DeMarco Murray cut out the fast food and rolled out the yoga mat in hopes of enjoying an injury-free senior season.

Murray, the talented and oft-injured running back, has dealt with a toe injury, a fractured kneecap and a torn hamstring at various points during his Oklahoma career. Those setbacks convinced Murray to perform some preventative maintenance on his body before the grind of the regular season begins.

"In high school, I felt I was invincible," Murray said Wednesday at Big 12 Media Days. "I used to eat McDonald's right before practice, have some soda, not stretch. Now it's a different game. You definitely have to take this seriously in terms of stretching and eating right."

Murray replaced hamburgers with pasta, grilled chicken and vegetables. He also embraced exercise routines like boxing, mixed martial arts and Pilates.

With the new fitness regimen established, Murray doesn't mind establishing high expectations for his senior season.

"If I'm healthy and I get the carries, I definitely feel I can get 2,000 yards," Murray said.

If so, Murray would become OU's all-time leading rusher. He needs roughly 1,650 yards to break Billy Sims' school record of 4,118.

Coaches play nice

If the media days fare seemed more bland than usual, here's why.

"We were told that we needed to stay away from the future of the Big 12 and our opinions about the future of the Big 12," Texas coach Mack Brown said.

With that in mind, Brown didn't express any strong feelings about the future of UT's Red River rivalry against Oklahoma. With the Big 12 expected to discontinue its championship game, some have suggested moving OU-Texas to the first week of December. The teams traditionally meet in October at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas.

"I think the contract for Dallas and for the Cotton Bowl and the state fair is through 2015, and I'm sure that a lot of people now will look at the possibilities of what we will do in the Big 12 if we do not have a championship game to fill the void," Brown said. "I think all of those are issues that our athletic directors and our presidents will start looking at immediately, I'm sure."

Beat Texas?

Brown also steered clear of any inflammatory remarks regarding the Longhorns' much-anticipated visit to Nebraska. Hype for that matchup began to build after Nebraska produced a promotional video featuring the words "Beat Texas." (The phrase has since been removed from the video.)

"I think that's a compliment to us, to be honest, for a program like Nebraska to be talking about us at this time in the season," Brown said.

Boise boys

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins reunited with other members of the Boise State fraternity this summer, spending time with former coach Dirk Koetter and current coach Chris Peterson.

"The fabric there is unbelievable," Hawkins said before tracing his many connections to the present Boise staff. "All those guys were best friends. Some of those guys I've known for 20 years. I'm very connected to that."

Success at Boise hasn't translated for its former coaches. Koetter was fired at Arizona State, and Hawkins' job security seems to be an annual media day topic.

Hawkins, who is 16-33 entering his fifth season at CU, said no win total has been stipulated to retain his job.

"No, and I don't ever worry about that," Hawkins said. "I really don't. The No. 1 goal is not worried about winning and losing. It's about chasing personal excellence."

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Big 12 media days: Once again, Colorado unsettled at quarterback

by: BILL HAISTEN World Sports Writer
Wednesday, July 28, 2010
7/28/2010 4:08:23 PM

IRVING, Texas – During each of the previous two seasons, Colorado's problems included instability at the quarterback position.

Cody Hawkins (son of Buffaloes head coach Dan Hawkins) was the opening-day starter in 2008 and again in 2009, but by the end of each season, Tyler Hansen was the No. 1 quarterback.

As the Buffs prepare to convene for the start of August camp, Dan Hawkins once again has a decision to make.

For the Sept. 4 opener against Colorado State in Denver, will Cody Hawkins (a fifth-year senior) or Hansen (a junior) get the start?

"I think we're very blessed," Dan Hawkins said during Wednesday's Big 12 Media Days exchange with reporters. "We've got two really good kids. They really want to win, and they understand that concept.

"Really, on any given day, you could probably split them with a razor hair. We'll see how that goes. I think Tyler probably had a little bit of an edge coming out of spring ball. But it's very tough to get through a whole season with one guy, anyway. Good chance we're going to need both of those players."

Colorado has accepted an invitation to join the Pac-10, but it has not been determined whether the Buffaloes will leave the Big 12 next year or in 2012.

Dan Hawkins was a winner at Boise State, but through four seasons at Colorado, his record is 16-33. Before the 2009 season, he issued a challenge to his players: "Ten wins and no excuses." By mid-October, the Buffs were 1-4. They went on to finish 3-9 overall, 2-6 in the Big 12.


Hawkins' job status was the subject of speculation last season, but he was given a contract extension that extends through the 2012 season. Colorado has accepted an invitation to join the Pac-10, but it has not been determined whether the Buffaloes will leave the Big 12 next year or in 2012. If the Buffaloes do not show significant improvement this season, they might have a new coach when they move to the Pac-10.

"Let's look at this thing from an objective standpoint," Hawkins said on Wednesday.

"Can we clean this up? Can we be responsible for this? So for our team, that's been the whole focus. . . . I know we went around and state and did the little tour around the state with our coaching staff. Everybody is generally very fired up . . . and very supportive."

Whether Cody Hawkins or Hansen is the quarterback, the support for Dan Hawkins could dissipate if the Colorado offense doesn't hit a more productive stride. In 2009, the Buffs were last in the Big 12 in total offense and 10th in scoring.

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