

Thorburn: Built-in CU gridiron rivalry dates back to 1910-47

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 06/19/2011 11:32:41 PM MDT

One of the many reasons why college football rivalries are great is because they give us something to talk about and look forward to when the NBA and NHL playoffs are over and the NFL players are locked out.

Michigan fans are having a great summer because Ohio State fans are having a miserable summer.

Alabama won the 2009 BCS national title. Auburn's response in 2010 was: Anything the Tide can do, the Tigers can do better.

Now the Buffs need someone to compete against for yearly bragging rights. And Centennial Cup smack talk just doesn't do much to stir the offseason pot.

Great rivalries typically aren't played on Sept. 17. That's the date this fall when Colorado will participate in the "Rocky Mountain Showdown" against Colorado State at Invesco Field.

Most years, the Buffs have everything to lose and not much to gain against the Sheep. The big brothers lead the lopsided series 61-20-2. Since Bradlee Van Pelt ran out of eligibility, the matchup hasn't been intriguing enough to justify being played in an NFL stadium.

CU and its fan base would be better served if the program rotated regional opposition -- Air Force, CSU, Nebraska -- on the schedule instead of bowing to political pressure and playing the Mountain West bottom feeders from Fort Collins every year.

Thankfully, there is a built-in rival waiting in the Pac-12.

Utah will face Brigham Young University on Sept. 17, in Provo. Now that the Utes have joined a BCS conference, playing a jealous independent with 25-year-old players isn't the same as the bitter Holy War days when the programs were fighting for conference championships and national respect.

I'll give you Florida vs. Tennessee, a great early-season SEC rivalry. But some of the other games on the Sept. 17 docket this season include -- Alabama vs. North Texas, Georgia vs. Coastal Carolina, TCU vs. Louisiana-Monroe, Texas A&M vs. Idaho, Penn State at Temple, and Oregon vs. Missouri State.

THE GAME for most major programs takes place in late November. Which brings us back to the future: CU vs. Utah on Nov. 25.

Can these old foes develop this series into a worthy season-ending Pac-12 grudge match?

Well, Larry Scott certainly wants that to happen. And the conference's brash commissioner usually gets what he wants, except for Texas.

Having the Buffs and Utes clash at the end of the season makes sense, considering the programs are joining the party the same year. Plus, everyone else already has a partner for the last dance -- Arizona/Arizona State, Cal/Stanford, Oregon/Oregon State, UCLA/USC and Washington/Washington State.

There is also some great history between these two on the gridiron. From 1910-1947, CU and Utah battled for supremacy in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference and Mountain States Conference.

The Buffs lead the all-time series 30-24-3, but still have an old score to settle with Utah. In 1961, the Utes made their last visit to Folsom Field and upset previously undefeated and Orange Bowl-bound CU, 21-12.

"That was a heart-breaker," Bill Harris, the Buffs' star running back, recalled. "I think we were ranked seventh in the country at that time. Utah came in and beat us."

The following season, Utah beat CU again, 37-21, on Sept. 22, 1962, in Salt Lake City. The programs haven't played since.

"I think it's great. I think there will be a natural rivalry," said former Utah tailback Bud Scalley, who scored the final touchdown in the series nearly half a century ago. "Colorado has been in a very tough league. Utah will have to get up to speed real quick."

Actually, the Utes are in much better position to thrive in the Pac-12 right now than the Buffs. Utah has won two BCS bowls -- including a 31-17 thrashing of Alabama in the Sugar Bowl -- with two unbeaten seasons since 2004. Kyle Whittingham is one of the best head coaches in the country. Thanks in part to the 2002 Olympics, Utah has some of the best facilities in the country.

"I'm sure the Utah game this year will bring back memories of that loss, which was not a pleasant loss for us," said Joe Romig, an All-American on CU's 1961 squad who became a Rhodes Scholar and is enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame. "They will be a great addition. They've had some really strong teams recently."

Don't be surprised if Utah is playing for a South Division title and a chance to host the inaugural Pac-12 championship game this season.

The rebuilding Buffs could certainly get the rivalry rekindled in a hurry if they spoiled such a party with a payback win 50 years in the making.

"Colorado has fallen off the past few years, but I'm sure they'll get it back because they have great tradition," Scalley said. "I think it will help both schools a lot. We're really excited to about it. I'm sure it won't take long to get a good rivalry going there."

The CU-UCLA game will be intriguing because of the friendship between Jon Embree and Rick Neuheisel, and the loathing many Buffs fans have of their program's former head coach. Folsom Field will also be rocking when Arizona, Oregon and USC are in town.

But it just feels natural for Colorado's conference rival to be wearing red and scheduled for the Friday after Thanksgiving.

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)