

Buff s see change in attitude this spring

Intensity of physical play rises under new coaching staff

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Posted: 03/18/2011 12:13:27 AM MDT

Colorado wrapped up the first portion of spring football Thursday with a hard-nosed scrimmage on the lower practice fields prior to taking the next 10 days off for spring break.

Coach Jon Embree characterized the first scrimmage of his tenure as game-like with a series of 70-yard drives, with field goal attempts replacing punts if the offense was stopped.

Embree credited the offense with making the greatest strides through the first six practices and said he liked what he saw from his running game, which produced 186 yards on 38 carries. Embree also said quarterbacks Tyler Hansen and Nick Hirschman played well.

"I was very pleased with how well we ran the ball," Embree said. "We're starting to establish our physical nature."

When the Buffs reconvene for the final nine practices this spring on March 28, they will have a much better idea of what to expect and what is expected of them than they did before spring practices began earlier this month.

Media and fans who were allowed to watch the first three sessions this spring came away with a general consensus that dramatic differences were evident in how the team goes about its business compared to the pallid approach the past five years under former coach Dan Hawkins. Practices appeared to be more physical and intense with heightened expectations from the new coaching staff.

The Camera asked three veteran players to share their thoughts on what they are experiencing this year:

Senior tight end

Ryan Deehan

Q -- What are your impressions of the differences you see in the way things are being done this year as compared to previous springs you have experienced here?

A -- "The main thing I've really noticed is, do it right or get out. And if you don't know it, then don't come back. They're taking the time to teach us and it's our job to learn it. And it's really not that hard if you take the time to learn it. It's been good for us 'cause it's forcing guys, who in the past haven't really learned the system that well, to actually know what they're doing now."

Q -- Why haven't guys learned the system in the past?

A -- "Just 'cause they were allowed to get away with certain things like, 'Ah, no, you can't do that.' Now it's like, 'Do it or get off the field.' I definitely like it, personally."

Q -- Do you think being allowed to get away with it, so to speak, in the past contributed to losing games?

A -- "I think it didn't allow guys to get to their full potential. One of the things I've really noticed is they're forcing us to be good now and not letting us take our time to learn something. It's like, 'Learn it. Do it. Make it translate now or we'll put someone else in who can.'"

Junior defensive end

Forrest West

Q -- What are some of the differences you see this spring versus the past here?

A -- "Definitely there is a huge difference in the intensity of practice. I think we go much harder. There is a big emphasis on team, period. They just really enforce, like, doing the right thing. Like when you make a mistake, like in previous springs, you would get a pat on your butt like, 'Alright, get it next time.' Now if you mess up, it's on you. If you make a mistake, they get on you, but after that they expect you to know it. There's really no babying going on."

Q -- You say babying, do you think some of that ultimately contributed to the results you guys produced on the field last year?

A -- "I'd definitely have to say yes to that. We definitely weren't as tough in games as we could have been. I feel we'll be a lot tougher next fall. When we're in tough situations we're not going to just put our heads down and sulk about it. We're going to do something about it, I feel like. We'll just be better prepared than we were."

Q -- What is it like being out there and having these coaches in your face expecting you to perform at such a high level?

A -- "It's real intense. My first practice, it took me by a big surprise. I was nervous like everybody else. It was the first practice with new coaches. I was just getting my butt kicked out there. I wasn't ready for it. From that day on, I feel like I rebounded. I knew what was expected. I just had to go hard, 100 percent."

Senior quarterback

Tyler Hansen

Q -- Could you compare this spring to other springs you have experienced here?

A -- "More professional. You've got to do your job. If you don't do your job, you're going to be punished, you're going to do some things for it. In springs prior, I feel like it was more easy going, more laid back, more relaxed. We still got some work in, but I feel like this is a lot more professional. Being that it's coach Embree's first spring and we're installing a new offense, it's got to be professional. I feel like it's a lot more businesslike."

Q -- What results do you expect that to translate into?

A -- "Being that all these coaches are mostly from the NFL, they expect you to be professional. They expect you to study, they expect you to watch film, all that stuff. So you pretty much got to act like you're a professional. You've got to act like you're in the next level. That's what we're trying to do. That's what we're trying to install and I feel like it's kind of bringing everyone's play a little up."

Q -- The former coaching staff would probably feel like they expected everyone to be professional, too. Wouldn't you say?

A -- "I feel like the old staff, they would expect you to be professional, but there wasn't as much accountability. They weren't making sure you were doing the right stuff. They would tell you to do stuff and you would do it, but if didn't do it or you didn't do it right, there wasn't as much punishment or accountability that we needed."

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