

CU Buffs' coaches playing catch-up

Cabral & Co. working to get Buffs ready for Cyclones

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Colorado

football coaches have done their best to keep preparation for Saturday's home game with Iowa State as normal as possible for players during a week in which the firing of former head coach Dan Hawkins was announced.

By all accounts, practices have gone smoothly and the Buffs have responded with solid effort and energy.

"I am surprised with the way this team is responding," interim head coach Brian Cabral said, following Wednesday's session. Cabral said he has been impressed with the way the team has taken a genuine interest in everything he has had to say.

But while preparation has remained fairly standard for the players, it is anything but normal for the coaches, who are scrambling to handle all their usual duties and also help Cabral with everything Hawkins generally does throughout the week.

Defensive coordinator Ron Collins is doing most of the on-field coaching for all the linebackers. Cabral generally coaches the inside linebackers.

By far the biggest challenge is preparing for the first game day without Hawkins making decisions and deciding who will make them this week. The defense should be far less affected than the offense.

"Offense is going to run the offense and defense is going to run the defense," Cabral said. "This is the first time I've ever watched the offense practice. I'm very confident in our offensive coaches. I've been having ongoing discussions with them just to help me understand, but also me helping them understand what I'm looking for."

If Cabral was an offensive assistant, things might be a little easier because he would be familiar with groupings and play calls and he would probably have ideas in mind for situations where the head coach makes decisions, such as going for it on fourth downs or attempting a 2-point conversion.

"I'll confer. I don't know it all. I don't have all the answers, I don't," Cabral said. "I'm going to have to rely and depend on these

coaches."

Cabral joked about one point in Wednesday's practice when the offense made a good play. He said he was mad at the defense before he remembered he needed to congratulate the offense.

Cabral said he is learning the offensive system on the fly, but his only real option this week as he prepares for his first day on the sidelines as a head coach is to plan ahead to the best of his ability and have a little faith in the men he works with each day.

"I've got to go into this game trusting our coaches," Cabral said.

Coaches plan to spend significant parts of today and Friday in meetings to go over any possible situations they can dream up that might cause confusion. If any of those situations do arise against the Cyclones, they will have a plan in place.

"We're going to go through every situation and talk through it as a staff to make sure we're prepared, but we don't know yet," offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said. "It will be different."

Apparently, coaches already are considering a different approach than what was announced under Hawkins for handling an injury to starting quarterback Cody Hawkins. Kiesau said he did not want to tip his hand to Iowa State coaches by discussing the issue Wednesday, but there could be someone other than true freshman Nick Hirschman under center if Cody Hawkins has to come out of the game briefly.

If Hirschman was used, it would burn his redshirt season in the 10th, 11th or 12th game of the season. Neither he or the program would likely get much value from that. Hirschman would likely still be the option at quarterback if Hawkins had to come out of the game for an extended period of time.

Cabral said he is not worried about how the team will bounce back from an historic fourth-quarter collapse last week at Kansas. The Cyclones come to town looking to become bowl eligible by earning their sixth win of the year. Preventing them from doing so is not what fuels the Buffs, Cabral said.

"Iowa State doesn't help us get focused," he said. "We help us get focused. This situation is helping us get focused."

Plenty of things might go wrong -- and they might not -- Saturday. Cabral said the only thing that matters to him ultimately is that his team wins and the players get back to enjoying the game.

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More change needed for Buffs

By Brian Howell
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Whenever a team begins a search for a head coach, it's always a little fun to think about the possibilities.

If the University of Colorado could somehow lure Les Miles away from LSU, that would be great.

Former Oregon coach Mike Bellotti could be a home run hire, too.

But, as a large contingent of CU fans celebrate the firing of Dan Hawkins and wonder who might be next, don't forget this: The identity of the next coach is not the most important factor here.

No matter who ends up coaching the Buffaloes, CU has to change the way it operates or that coach will wind up with the same fate Hawkins faced.

CU went 19-39 under Hawkins' watch, but to pin that all on Hawkins would be irresponsible. No coach in the Big 12 has had to deal with the level of limitations Hawkins has had since arriving in December of 2005.

"It takes a whole lot of people to win, and when things aren't always going right, it seems like they always look to the head coach," Colorado State head coach Steve Fairchild said in talking about Hawkins' firing. "Maybe there's some other things there that could have been done better there to help him."

No question, Hawkins could have done a better job. But, CU could have done a better job of helping him, too.

"We have an idea of some of the mistakes that we as a program have made, not necessarily just Dan — whether it's the academic profile of our student-athletes to our need to increase facilities, to our scheduling philosophies, to other nuances that are really sometimes tough to describe and understand," athletic director Mike Bohn said.

Bohn essentially admitted CU didn't do Hawkins any favors and that the school might have to change that.

"What's different (this time) is the sense of maybe trying to do a better job of pulling together resources to help the coach be successful," Bohn said.

Hawkins couldn't attract some of the talent his rivals could, simply because CU has tougher academic standards than other schools in the Big 12 — and the Pac-12, where CU will be next year, for that matter.

Hawkins was also limited because CU's facilities don't measure up to what other schools have.

CU also has a tougher time attracting top-notch assistant coaches because it pays less money and offers less job security for assistants than other schools.

Add it all up, and Hawkins didn't have a lot of support from within. It's important to factor that in when evaluating the Hawkins era.

Many fans want Bill McCartney back leading the Buffs. But, don't forget that McCartney operated under a different set of rules when he was in Boulder.

Give Hawkins the same rules, and he might still have a job. Put McCartney in Hawkins' shoes — something the Buffs just might do — and he, too, might have gone 19-39.

That's the major key to this search. It's not just finding the right guy. It's making sure the University of Colorado is 100 percent committed to making football a priority.

"From the president down to our janitors, we're all committed to trying to build the program and win games," Bohn said.

If that's true, CU could be in good shape moving forward.

But, if CU continues operating the way it has operated for the past several years, don't expect a simple change at head coach to all of a sudden make the Buffs a national power.

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