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college football

CU players setting sights on last 4 games, bowl

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Disappointed but apparently not discouraged, Colorado players vow to continue their fight for bowl eligibility while trying to shake off a 43-10 loss to No. 11 Oklahoma on Saturday night.

Colorado was squashed by the Sooners, but a carrot still dangles in front of the Buffaloes. Colorado (3-5, 0-4 Big 12) must win three of its last four games to become bowl-eligible. CU has not played in a bowl game since 2007. Ahead this weekend is Kansas (2-6, 0-4), which has been outscored 187-40 in four conference games.

"There's a possible reward out there that we want to achieve," Buffs sophomore defensive tackle Will Pericak said late Saturday of a bowl invitation. "This team doesn't quit. We play hard, no matter what."

It appears Dan Hawkins will remain head coach at least for another week. After the loss to the

Sooners, Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said no announcement is forthcoming this week concerning Hawkins' job status.

Hawkins, 19-38 deep into his fifth season, is believed to be working on borrowed time. It would be a surprise if Bohn hasn't already begun compiling a list of candidates to be CU's new coach for 2011. As for the present, Hawkins said after the loss to Oklahoma that he will "get after it" at work every day.

"We know we have a lot to play for," Pericak said of the last four games. "We can still have a good season. We can still go to a bowl game."

From the sounds of it, Colorado players are treating the remaining schedule as a four-game season.

"We have a lot left (to play for)," senior quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "We know that we have four games ahead of us that everybody is really excited about."

"Nobody is short on any motivation. We're going to go in and prepare. I don't care what's happened for however many games we've played. We have four more left and we have to take advantage of it."

Although Colorado often plays well against Nebraska, it figures to be a tall order to upset the now ninth-ranked Cornhuskers (7-1, 3-1) on Nov. 26, the Big 12 finale for both teams. But CU's other three games appear, on paper at least, winnable:



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• **Saturday, at Kansas:** Former Nebraska All-American Turner Gill hasn't worked any magic in his first season as head coach at Kansas. The Jayhawks posted a nice early season victory over Georgia Tech, but that followed an opening-game debacle against North Dakota State. KU has not been competitive against Big 12 foes.

• **Nov. 13, vs. Iowa State:** Don't look now, but the Cyclones (5-4, 3-2) need one victory to become bowl eligible. It might have to come against Colorado, because Iowa State still must play Nebraska and No. 14 Missouri.

• **Nov. 20, vs. Kansas State:** After opening with four victories, the Wildcats (5-3, 2-3) have slipped into a midseason slump with three losses in four games. It didn't seem so at the time, but the 47-42 loss at Baylor looks tolerable now.

Colorado has not won three consecutive games since the beginning of the 2008 season and has never notched three consecutive conference victories under Dan Hawkins.

And those three games are certainly losable too, especially if Colorado continues to repeat a familiar formula, including last weekend at Oklahoma. Namely, the defense plays well early but eventually gets worn down because the CU offense can't move the chains to stay on the field.

During one stretch in the first half against Oklahoma, the Buffs' offense went three-and-out on six of seven possessions. Going the other way, the Sooners broke open the game with a

26-point second quarter as CU tired.

"(Oklahoma) made some big plays . . . but I'm real confident in this team," CU senior linebacker B.J. Beatty said. "Like Coach Hawk (said) last season, we're only one or two plays from changing everything around."

Time is running short.

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For the record: Something has to give because Kansas (2-6, 0-4 Big 12) and Colorado (3-5, 0-4) remain the only Big 12 teams without a victory. The Jayhawks are coming off a 28-16 loss at Iowa State.

Who's hot: Sophomore D.J. Beshears, a 5-foot-8, 174-pound wide receiver, ranks second among Big 12 kick returners with 27.8 yards per return.

Who's not: The Kansas defense, or lack thereof. In four Big 12 games, the Jayhawks yielded an average of 46.8 points. That's the league's worst average by a large margin. Texas Tech is 11th with an average of 36.2 points allowed.

Key stat: Against Iowa State, Kansas netted just 119 rushing yards on 42 carries, including lost yards to two sacks. That's an average gain of 2.8 yards and it came against an Iowa State defense that, even with that effort, still ranks just 10th among Big 12 teams in rush defense.

FYI: Kansas had to go with third-string quarterback Quinn Mecham because starter Jordan Webb (shoulder) and top backup Kale Pick (concussion) were out. Mecham, a junior college transfer who expected to redshirt this season, completed 22-of-33 passes for 149 yards, with one TD pass and one interception.

Tom Kensler, *The Denver Post*

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