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## Kansas is struggling even worse than CU

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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When a team remains winless in the Big 12 but its coach is encouraged by baby steps of progress during yet another decisive loss, it's obvious that football program is really struggling.

No, it's not Colorado we're talking about, but Kansas.

Something has to give Saturday afternoon in Lawrence, Kan., because the Jayhawks (2-6, 0-4 Big 12) and Colorado (3-5, 0-4) are the last remaining conference teams without a league victory.

Kansas scored with seven seconds left to make the 28-16 loss at Iowa State appear respectable. But first-year KU coach Turner Gill said Monday on the Big 12 coaches teleconference that he saw improvement. After all, KU entered the game in Ames having yielded an average of 53 points per game in league play. And Kansas led

9-7 at halftime.

"We simplified some things (on defense)," Gill said. "We just let our guys play, and they really did a better job."

Just three years removed from a 12-1 season with a win over Virginia Tech in the Orange Bowl, Kansas ranks at or near the bottom of almost every major Big 12 team statistical category. For conference games only, the Jayhawks are last in scoring offense (10.0), total offense (300.0), scoring defense (46.8), rushing defense (247.2) and total defense (517.2).

Gill turned a beleaguered University at Buffalo program into a Mid-American Conference champion before taking over at Kansas for Mark Mangino, who was forced out. Rebuilding will take time, Gill said.

"We just have to continue to get our guys to execute the things we do. I think we will," said Gill, who led Nebraska to a 28-2 record as the starting quarterback in the early 1980s. "I think we will continue to improve. That's all you can ask yourself to do."

### KU QB up in air.

Gill said he might not know his starting quarterback for Saturday's game until Thursday. Kansas had to go with third-string quarterback Quinn Meacham last weekend against Iowa State because the usual starter, redshirt freshman Jordan Webb (shoulder), and top backup Kale Pick (concussion) were out.



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A junior college transfer, Mecham was being redshirted until pressed into service Saturday. He completed 22-of-33 passes for 149 yards, with one touchdown pass and one interception. Webb and Pick will practice this week, Gill said.

## Patterson hurting.

During Dan Hawkins' turn on the Big 12 teleconference, the Buffaloes coach said "we'll see" when asked if senior wide receiver Travon Patterson will play Saturday. Patterson sprained an ankle at Oklahoma. Regarding the severity of the sprain, Hawkins said, "He got it pretty good."

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## **Six wins could have the Buffs on the outside looking in**

*By Brian Howell*  
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With four games to play, the University of Colorado football team is still eyeing bowl eligibility.

The Buffs are 3-5 and need to go 3-1 the rest of the way to become eligible for a bowl.

Looking at the schedule, there is reason for Buffs fans to be optimistic that CU can get there. The next three games are against Kansas (2-6), Iowa State (5-4) and Kansas State (5-3) — all teams the Buffs have the potential to beat.

Win those and the Buffs go bowling, right?

Well, maybe.

Kansas State head coach Bill Snyder made a good point Monday. During the weekly Big 12 coaches teleconference, he spoke about his own team, which needs just one more win for bowl eligibility.

“You have to realize, I think we have eight bowl-alignment opportunities with the Big 12 Conference,” Snyder said. “If we were fortunate enough to be bowl eligible, we would be perhaps one of 10 (from the Big 12), so there’s no guarantee that you’re going to end up in a bowl with six wins.”

Looking at the Big 12 standings — as well as standings around the country — the Buffs may be on the bowl bubble even with six wins.

The Big 12 has eight bowl agreements, and right now, five teams are eligible. Three others have five wins, and two more have four wins.

The Buffs, with three wins at this point, have a long hill to climb to get into the top eight in the Big 12.

There is a chance that more than eight teams from the Big 12 will go to bowl games. There are 70 bowl slots available, all of them tied to particular teams or conferences. But not all of those slots will be filled with eligible teams.

The Mountain West, for instance, has six bowl slots (seven if Utah or TCU gets into a BCS bowl). Currently, the MWC has just three bowl-eligible teams — including TCU and Utah — and just one other with more than three wins.

However, even earning an at-large bid for, say, the New Mexico Bowl wouldn’t be easy for a 6-6 Colorado team. Entering this week, 35 teams already are bowl eligible, 43 more are within two wins of eligibility and 14 others are sitting with the Buffs at three wins. That makes CU one of 93 teams still eyeing 70 bowl spots.

Then again, recent history suggests that six wins by a Big 12 team ought to be enough. In the past two years, every bowl-eligible team from a BCS conference went to a bowl game.

Notre Dame is the only major team to win at least six games and not go bowling in the last two years, but that was by

choice. The Irish were 6-6 a year ago but elected not to play in a bowl.

The last time BCS conference teams failed to go bowling with six wins was in 2007, when six 6-6 teams — including Iowa, Louisville and South Carolina — were not selected for bowls. Of course, there were only 64 bowl slots that year.

## **AROUND THE BIG 12**

CU coach Dan Hawkins said receiver Travon Patterson “sprained (his ankle) pretty good” against Oklahoma. His status is unknown for this week.

Wondering who will play quarterback for Kansas against Colorado on Saturday? Kansas coach Turner Gill is wondering, too. The Jayhawks have had three starters this year — Kale Pick, Jordan Webb and Quinn Mecham.

“They all three are probably going to have a chance,” Gill said.

Pick and Webb were out last week with injuries. If Webb is healthy, he’ll likely get the start.

Nebraska quarterback Taylor Martinez sprained his ankle against Missouri last week. Cornhuskers coach Bo Pelini said Martinez was “doing a lot better” Monday than he was Saturday.

It’s odd to see Texas at 4-4, and there are plenty of theories as to why it has slipped.

Longhorns coach Mack Brown offered his take. He rattled off several statistics that aren’t going in Texas’ favor, most notably that the Longhorns have created 15 fewer turnovers at this point than they did a year ago. He also mentioned stats that showed Texas is less successful scoring in the red zone and less successful stopping teams in the red zone this year.

“I’m fully aware of where we are and what’s going on, and I’ll get it fixed,” he said. “I don’t know if it’ll be this weekend, and I hope that we’ll get it straightened out before the end of the season. If we don’t, we’ll keep working, we’ll go to spring practice and we’ll be better next year.”

Iowa State (5-4) has won two in a row and is among the teams needing just one win for bowl eligibility.

“I think our confidence level is good because we’ve won two games in a row,” coach Paul Rhoads said.

Baylor (7-2) has been one of the biggest surprises in college football. The Bears are annually one of the worst teams in the Big 12, but they are feeling a different vibe around campus these days.

“I think everybody’s feeling good,” coach Art Briles said. “It’s nice to see people wearing green and gold and have a little bounce in their step.”

Big 12 players of the week: Nebraska’s Roy Helu Jr. (offense); Baylor’s Byron Landor (defense); and Baylor’s Derek Epperson (special teams).

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