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colorado football

Bowl berth remains in CU's sights

By Chris Dempsey
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Technically, Colorado's road to a bowl game down the stretch of this very trying season looks like this: Win, win, win, win. It would put the Buffaloes at seven wins, removing any doubt that may come with a bowl-eligible six.

The good thing about viewing things through a technical lens is it removes emotion from the equation. And that's a good thing, given the state of things around the football program these days.

Still, the ability to qualify for a bowl game is keeping Colorado's players going, when, at least going into today's game at Kansas, it seems most everything is falling apart around them. Colorado enters this game on a four-game losing streak after starting 3-1.

The Big 12 has tie-ins

with eight bowl games this season.

"We've still got something worth practicing for," running back Rodney Stewart said. "We come out every day saying, 'We gotta get there, we gotta get there.' I haven't been to a bowl game since I've been here, so we're just trying to work hard and I'm trying to finally get a shot to play in one."

Added senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight: "The coaches have talked to us about that. They do a good job of keeping us tuned in and letting

us know what we're playing for, and the different bowl games that are out there and just giving you a tangible goal to look to. So that's good.

"It kind of gives you a little bit of a fresh start, not all the way. But definitely working to play for a bowl game and realizing it's a realistic goal, it gives you something to play for."

The Buffs have gone 1-3 against Kansas the last four years.

Both teams are struggling. And as Colorado players have noted this week, both teams — winless in the Big 12 — are looking at the contest as an opportunity to get on track.

"Having something to play for is very, very important," CU quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "Just because the most intriguing thing about a bowl game is that's something that really has to do with you and your guys. It's a great time that you can spend with each other.

"You get 15 more practices, and for some guys it will be the last time they will ever get to play football again. So that's extending what you've been dreaming about doing your whole life for another month or so. So that's an awesome opportunity."

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The Buffs are doing whatever they can to keep spirits high, and having something to attain has helped.

"The past is the past. You've got to get over it and look to the brighter side of life," Stewart said. "We've still got four games, four winnable games. We've just got to put our minds together, come to practice and work hard every day so we can get those wins."

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Remembering Kansas

Sept. 18, 1999: Colorado 51, Kansas 17

With CU leaving the Big 12 after this season, The Denver Post looks back at the Buffs' conference opponents. Yes, there was a time when Colorado could score a bundle of touchdowns and also consistently kick field goals.

On the ground, through the air and by the foot, the Buffaloes crushed visiting Kansas 51-17 to give new CU coach Gary Barnett his first Big 12 victory.

Entering the game, Colorado fans were still unsure of the 1999 Buffs and of Barnett. CU had opened the season with a stunning 41-14 loss to Colorado State at old Mile High Stadium. Not much was learned the following week in a 63-35 home laughter over outmanned San Jose State, so all eyes were on the conference matchup with the Jayhawks, who had upset a Rick Neuheisel-coached CU team the previous year.

Kansas never had a chance this time. With quarterback Mike Moschetti throwing for two touchdowns, the Buffs raced to a 30-3 halftime lead and were never threatened. Moschetti finished 17-of-22 passing for 216 yards and the two TDs before leaving with a minor knee injury.

When CU's drives bogged down, it was no

problem. Place-kicker Jeremy Aldrich set a school record with five field goals, and none was a chip shot. The 3-pointers ranged in distance from 40 to 49 yards, the latter a career best.

A 96-yard fumble return for a touchdown by cornerback Ben Kelly with 12:17 remaining in the fourth quarter gave CU 50 or more points in back-to-back games for only the third time in the program's history and the first time since 1923.

The Buffs would finish the season with a 7-5 record, including a 62-28 victory over Boston College in the Insight.com Bowl in Tucson. There were some ups and downs, but all in all a solid beginning for a new head coach.

Tom Kensler, *The Denver Post*

THE SERIES

Overall: CU leads 42-24-3. In Boulder: CU leads 24-9 (1-0 in Denver). In Lawrence: CU leads 17-15-3.



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Solder holds bright future

By Brian Howell
© 2010 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — When Nate Solder was a student at Buena Vista High School, he had a decision to make.

The talented tight end was recruited by several colleges, who wanted him for their football teams. Solder's choice, however, wouldn't be based on football.

"I wanted to choose a university where I could get a good degree, and that's why I chose CU," he said.

Five years later, Solder and the University of Colorado have gotten more out of that decision than either of them bargained for. Solder has been brilliant both in the classroom and on the football field.

"He's going to be successful (in life)," CU offensive line coach Denver Johnson said. "Whatever it is, he's going to be extremely successful at it."

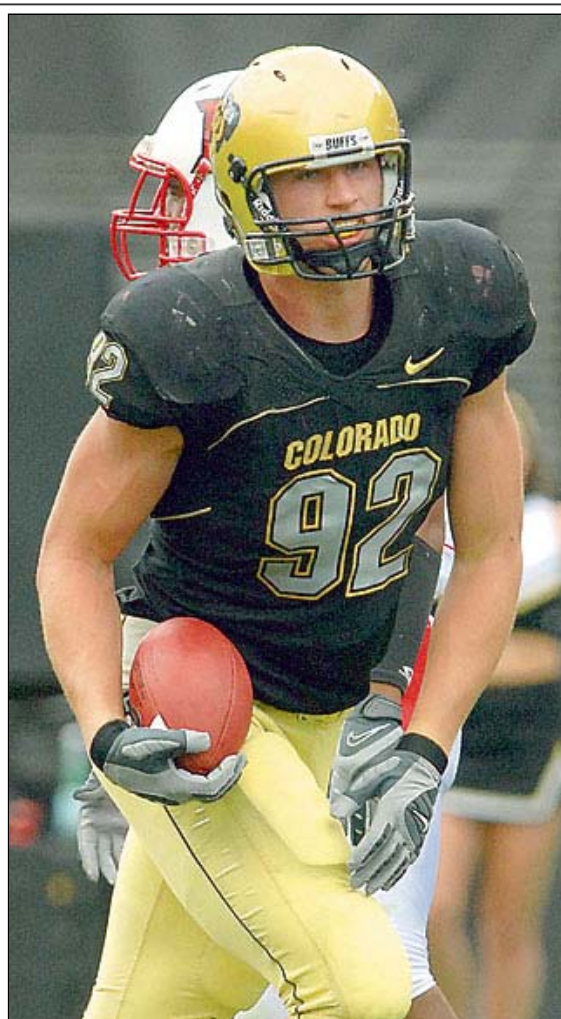
Solder's options for the future are rather remarkable.

He graduated in May with a degree in biology and is currently taking postgraduate classes in integrative physiology. Recently, he was named one of the 15 finalists for the William V. Campbell Trophy, which is also known as the academic Heisman. All finalists receive an \$18,000 post-graduate scholarship.

"I ultimately want to get a masters degree in biology," he said. "There's so many interesting things in (biology) and I'm not even sure exactly what I want to study, but it's going to be in biology."

Regardless of what Solder elects to study, he may have to put that on hold for a while.

In addition to being an accomplished student, Solder has National Football League scouts watching him every week. There is a general feeling among those scouts that the 6-foot-9, 315-pound Solder will be one of the first left tackles drafted in April — likely in the first round.



Colorado alum Nate Solder was recently named as one of 15 finalist for the William V. Campbell Trophy, also known as the academic Heisman. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call file**

Colorado Buffaloes (3-5, 0-4) at Kansas Jayhawks (2-6, 0-4)

When: Today, Noon

Where: Memorial Stadium in Lawrence, Kan.

TV/Radio: No TV/850AM

“They all like him a lot,” Johnson said. “You just can’t find guys that have things you can measure and none of the baggage. He’s not going to get in a fight in a strip joint, he’s not going to have a gun in his bag at the airport. None of that. He’s just a very humble, very conservative guy. He has none of the baggage that you read about so often in the newspaper. There’s just not a downside to the guy.”

Solder spent his first two seasons in Boulder as a tight end. But, during spring practice in 2008, he moved to tackle and added 30 pounds. He won the all-important starting job at left tackle that season and has played 2,276 out of CU’s 2,278 offensive snaps since then.

True to his nature, Solder isn’t letting the NFL hype get to his head.

“It’s a little out of my perception right now,” he said. “I’m just keeping my nose to the grindstone and I’m just kind of being myself and things have worked out really nicely. I’ve been blessed and I’ve been surrounded by great leaders and great people.”

He does admit, however, that the thought of playing in the NFL is a nice thought.

“It is exciting,” he said. “I kind of feel that it’s a great job, but you can’t blow it out of proportion. For me, it’s still going to be a lot of work and it’s going to be a journey and I’m going to have to get better.”

Although it may be difficult to believe, Solder can get better. He’s already one of the best left tackles in the country, and Johnson has graded him out at 90 percent or better in seven of eight games to this point (by comparison, CU’s other linemen have combined for 10 90-percent grades). But, there’s room to improve.

CU head coach Dan Hawkins said, “The great thing about him is I think his best days are still continually in front of him.”

Johnson, who marvels at Solder’s all-around athleticism, agrees.

“It’s all in front of him,” Johnson said. “I think his best football is still in front of him. He’s a long way from being maxed out.”

Johnson has been coaching for 25 years and said Solder clearly stands above anyone else he has coached.

“I’ve had some good ones,” he said. “I’ve had some guys that have gone to the pros and I’ve had some really talented guys, but I’ve never had anyone that’s had the whole package like he does.”

The series: CU leads 42-24-3 all-time, including 17-15-3 in Lawrence. The Buffs snapped a three-game losing streak to the Jayhawks last year.

Last week: Colorado suffered its fourth straight loss, at Oklahoma 43-10, while Kansas suffered its fourth straight loss, at Iowa State 28-16.

Did you know?: CU has played nine straight quarters without committing a turnover. The school record — or at least the record as could be found by CU sports information — is 10 straight quarters without a turnover. Kansas is last in the country in forcing turnovers, gaining just five this season.

Keep an eye on: Buffaloes — RB Rodney Stewart. Kansas ranks 112th in the country in rushing defense, so a big game could be in store for CU’s leading rusher, who is 263 yards away from his first 1,000-yard season. Jayhawks — WR/KR D.J. Beshears. He’s already returned a kickoff for a touchdown and ranks 17th nationally in kickoff returns (27.8 average). In addition, he has 177 rushing yards and has caught seven passes.

Key matchup: CU quarterback Cody Hawkins vs. Kansas defense. In four Big 12 games, Kansas has given up 55, 59, 45 and 28 points. The Buffs, who average 18.75 points per game, need to get the offense cranking against the Jayhawks.

Extra points: CU receiver Scotty McKnight takes a streak of 45 straight games with at least one catch into today. ... Kansas has lost 11 straight Big 12 games, beginning with last year’s loss at CU. The Buffs have lost seven straight Big 12 games. ... CU has committed fewer penalties in its last five games (27) than it did in its first three games this season (28). ... In total offense, CU ranks 83rd nationally (341.25 yards per game) and KU ranks 96th (323.5). CU is 103rd in scoring and Kansas is 112th (16.13). ... Defensively, KU ranks 88th in total defense and CU ranks 89th. ... Jordan Webb, who missed last week’s game with an injury, is expected to start at quarterback for Kansas if he’s healthy.

Prediction: The Buffs come into today with a streak of 16 straight losses outside of the state of Colorado. This may be the best shot they have of breaking that streak. Despite their 3-5 record, the Buffs have played well in two of their losses, and with a break here and there could be 5-3. Kansas, meanwhile, has been downright dreadful for much of the year. This is a great chance for the Buffs to snap their skid. Buffs 27, Jayhawks 17.

Brian Howell

That all-around package came from the small town of Buena Vista that Solder is proud to call home.

“That was a great community and a lot of great things come out of there,” Solder said of his hometown. “It’s a huge part of who I am. With that community, if was kind of, you’re a great athlete, but you’re also a great student and a great person. That’s what they teach there.”

Brian Howell can be reached at bhowell@times-call.com. Read his Buffs blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/howell

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CU Buffs head to Kansas

Desperate Buffs travel for next game

By Michael Krumholtz on November 6, 2010

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After his team's one-sided loss at Oklahoma, CU head coach Dan Hawkins walked out to greet winning quarterback Landry Jones. The Buffs head coach wanted to talk.

He did not bring up the 43-10 thrashing, nor the fact that Jones set a school-record for passing. Instead, the conversation focused on academics.

"I said, 'Hey, I'm really proud of you. You had a great game, but let's talk about academics,'" Hawkins said. "How are you doing on your school work?" I was on him about it there, and I'm not even coaching the guy."

Known for his involvement in community service and emphasis on players' grades, Hawkins has football to worry about now.

CU has now lost two of every three games they have played with Hawkins on the sidelines. In the wake of their fourth consecutive defeat, at least the Buffs (3-5, 0-4) have academics to talk about.

Some CU players have called this Saturday's game a "must-win" and it may represent the last crack at a bowl game. Kansas, who has not won a game since September, plays host in a match-up of two teams looking for their first win in Big 12 play.

The Jayhawks, just like the Buffs, have lost their last four games.

"I'm sure they feel like they can get one out on us at home," CU wide-out Toney Clemons said. "We definitely feel like we can go in there and get one. It's going to be two teams that are struggling and fighting."

Under first-year coach Turner Gill, the Jayhawks rank last in the conference in scoring offense and scoring defense. Gill debuted with a home loss to North Dakota State, a middle of the pack FCS squad.

Sound familiar? Hawkins' first game in Boulder resulted in a 19-10 defeat from the hands of Montana State.

When asked about his next opponent, Hawkins could not seem to make up his mind.

"They're playing a little bit streaky obviously," Hawkins said.

After going on to talk about how the Jayhawks battled nicely in a loss to Iowa State he concluded the Jayhawks are "playing well."

In the three games before that, Kansas lost by a combined 159 – 24.

With four games left and three wins needed to qualify for a bowl, the Buffs are getting desperate. Half of those remaining games come on the road, including this week's trip to Lawrence, Kansas.

As a senior, CU corner Jimmy Smith has only won two road games in his career. Both of those came during his freshman year.

"It's sickening to me because I know we can beat these teams. If we bring some of the teams we played on the road here we could beat them, badly," Smith said. "But then we go on the road and it's like we can't tie our shoes together for some reason. I hate it, I hate the fact that we can't go on the road and win a game."

The future pro, Smith, has never been on a winning team in his college career. And unless he and his teammates can string out three wins, he never will be.

Smith says the last four years is something he never expected.

"We've been through blizzards of nonsense," he said. "Being positive is really the only thing you can do in a situation like this."

Contact Staff Writer Michael Krumholtz at Michael.krumholtz@colorado.edu.

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Posted on Fri, Nov. 05, 2010

KU looking for elusive Big 12 win against Colorado

LAWRENCE | It's been so long since the Kansas Jayhawks have won a Big 12 game that they can hardly recall the details.

"I can't remember the last team we beat in the Big 12," KU senior cornerback Chris Harris said. "It's definitely been a while."

KU's last Big 12 win came against Iowa State on Oct. 10, 2009, 12 conference games ago. The Jayhawks' 11-game losing streak began a week later in Boulder, Colo., against a struggling Colorado team that upset KU 34-30.

At least one Jayhawk can remember that one.

"I thought about it yesterday," KU senior running back Angus Quigley said. "I was like, 'Man, we were 5-0, and they beat us.' It's been pretty much a rough go in the conference since then. But that has nothing to do with this season."

This season, the Jayhawks and Buffaloes enter today's game at Memorial Stadium with similar depressing outlooks. Both teams are 0-4 in Big 12 play with the lone bright spot of their season a win over a name school from Georgia (the Jayhawks beat Georgia Tech, and the Buffaloes knocked off Georgia).

Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Missouri close out KU's schedule, so the Buffaloes represent the Jayhawks' last realistic chance at a third victory.

"It's a big opportunity," Quigley said. "I'm sure they're thinking the same thing. They've watched the film. We haven't looked so good, ourselves. They're gonna be hungry for a win the same way we are."

One difference? KU coach Turner Gill will be around next season, while Colorado coach Dan Hawkins could be on his way out after another disappointing year in Boulder. Theoretically, a win would mean more for Gill's program at this juncture.

"There was improvement last week, but we still lost the football game," KU defensive coordinator Carl Torbush said. "All that matters is the end result. We gotta get a win. That's what we need to do."

COLORADO AT KANSAS

•**WHEN:** 1 p.m. today

•**WHERE:** Memorial Stadium, Lawrence

•**TV/RADIO:** No TV; KCSP (610 AM)

Other story lines

•**WILL KU CONTINUE TO IMPROVE ITS PASS RUSH?** Ever since the Jayhawks moved Toben Oporum to defensive end, they have started getting pressure on opposing quarterbacks. They've had four sacks in the last two games.

•**CAN KU WIN THE SPECIAL-TEAMS BATTLE?** The Jayhawks have had plenty of issues with special teams throughout the season, the latest gaffe coming on a punt return for a touchdown by Iowa State.

•**CAN KU STOP RODNEY STEWART?** The Jayhawks have struggled with tackling all season, and Stewart, Colorado's 5-foot-6 running back, is hard to find, much less tackle.

| J. Brady McCollough, jmccollough@kcstar.com

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