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CU looks to halt Missouri

By Brian Howell
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BOULDER — To say that Missouri stuffed the Colorado run game last year wouldn't be fair to Missouri.

In a 36-17 loss to the Tigers last season, CU finished with minus-14 yards on the ground on 24 attempts.

As the Buffs (3-1) prepare to face the Tigers (4-0) this Saturday, they believe that stat will look considerably different this time.

"I feel like we can (run the ball), for sure," CU left guard Ethan Adkins said. "We're a lot more physical this year and we're getting good surge off the ball. Watching film of them, I think we're going to be able to get a lot of good push."

A large chunk of CU's motivation this week has stemmed from the fact that Missouri has owned this series, winning the past four games by a combined score of 177-40.

CU's inability to run the ball has been a big reason for the losing skid against the Tigers. Last year's minus-14 performance was the worst, but in 2008 CU had 41 yards on 35 attempts, and in 2007, it had 84 yards on 30 attempts.

What's different this year?

"We've matured up front (in the offensive line) and guys have seen the fruits of their labor in the last two weeks," CU running backs coach Darian Hagan said. "They have a real true belief they can get it done. The running backs are running with a sense of urgency. They believe the guys in front of them are going to get the job done."

CU's run game has emerged in the past two weeks. The Buffs gained 252 yards on the ground in a 31-13 win over Hawaii on Sept. 18 and added 235 yards in a 29-27 win over Georgia last week.

Quarterback Tyler Hansen said offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau's willingness to stick to the run game has been a factor.

"I think so," Hansen said. "I think we're a little more patient in our play-calling and we let things kind of play their way out. Coach Kiesau is doing a good job of sticking with the run game."

The way it's working, why wouldn't he?

Brian Lockridge (109 yards) and Rodney Stewart (106) both topped 100 yards against Hawaii.

Against Georgia, Lockridge got the start, gaining just 36 yards on 16 carries. The biggest benefit to starting Lockridge, however, may have been the motivation it gave to Stewart.

Hagan said that in the past, he would give Stewart the discretion on whether to take the other back out of the game. Against Georgia, Lockridge ran the ball nine times on the first drive. Stewart asked Hagan if he could go in the game, and Hagan said no.

Once Stewart did get in, he posted one of the best games of his career, rushing for 149 yards and a touchdown.

“He ran with passion,” Hagan said of Stewart. “He was extremely aggressive.”

The Lockridge-Stewart combo now has confidence heading into Missouri.

“That’s going to help us a lot,” Hagan said. “Both of those guys, when their number is called, are going to be playing with a sense of urgency. They’ll go out say, ‘If I’m doing this correct, the other guy is going to be on the sideline.’”

As for Missouri’s ability to stop the run, the Tigers have been up and down. McNeese State (65) and Miami of Ohio (70) were both stuffed on the ground by the Tigers.

On the other hand, Illinois (200) and San Diego State (250) both racked up a lot of yards rushing. Those were Missouri’s two closest games.

That’s why Hagan said the Buffs have to be successful on the ground.

“It’s going to be key,” Hagan said. “If we can get our running game going and sustain some long drives, it’s going to keep their offense off the field.”

EXTRA POINTS: Under head coach Dan Hawkins, the Buffs are 8-1 when they rush for 200 yards or more. ... Hansen has helped in the run game, too. Not counting sacks, he has 86 yards and a touchdown on 13 rushing attempts the past two games combined. ... CU has been held under 90 yards rushing in five of its past seven meetings with Missouri.

Brian Howell can be reached at
bhowell@times-call.com.

Pac-10 ADs discuss alignment options

Presidents will make final decision

Associated Press
Boulder Daily Camera

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The Pac-10's athletic directors wrapped up two days of agenda-setting meetings in San Francisco on Thursday and, not surprisingly, nothing was settled.

Faced with the complex task of creating plans for revenue sharing, divisional alignment and a championship game in football, the athletic directors hashed out the details that will set the foundation for the conference's presidents and chancellors at their meeting on Oct. 21.

"I'm very pleased with how the meetings went," Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said. "I would describe it as significant progress on the important strategic issues we've been debating and I feel good about where we are. In my view, we've narrowed the options and kind of flushed out the pro and cons of different scenarios in a way we hoped we would."

The meetings were never intended to reach any final conclusions, only recommendations for the board as the conference expands to 12 teams next school year with the addition of Colorado and Utah.

The three major, interconnected issues are complex and wide-ranging, each school having its own unique stake in what happens.

Revenue sharing is the marquee issue, whether to continue with the current appearance-based model, which favors USC and UCLA, or to split up the money equally among the 12 schools.

The football championship game appears to be a done deal, but the conference still needs to decide whether to use an NFL-based model where the higher-ranked team plays at home or to hold it at a neutral site like San Diego or Las Vegas.

Finding a way to break the 12 teams into divisions has been a complex task, with schools wanting to make sure they still get to play traditional rivals every year and to play in Southern California.

The conference is looking at several options, from splitting the conference North/South or East/West, to a "zipper" model that would split up geographical rivals down the middle and have them play in the season finale.

"There isn't anything final yet," Washington AD Scott Woodward said. "But I think we will find a consensus on that as well."

While the AD meetings didn't produce anything concrete, they were a big step in shaping what will become the Pac-12 next school year. The issues were debated, concerns were raised and addressed and, in some cases, compromises were proposed to keep everyone happy.

"It was a very productive meeting and I think we all got a chance to hear everybody's concerns and feelings," Arizona AD Greg Byrne said. "I think we made a lot of good progress and look forward to the CEOs making long-term decisions for the conference. Obviously, whenever you have issues, there are going to be differing opinions, but I feel real good about the direction we're going."

That direction is toward the board meeting in two weeks, when the schools' presidents and chancellors get the task of reshaping a conference that hasn't expanded since 1978.

The groundwork has been set.

"I believe they'll feel very comfortable finalizing these issues and making clear decisions," Scott said.

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Q&A with Charles Johnson

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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Quarterback Charles Johnson is almost certainly the most important backup quarterback in CU history. He was on the field in place of an injured Darian Hagan for the memorable fifth-down game in Missouri, and also helped lead the Buffs to an Orange Bowl win later that year when Hagan was injured again. He remained in Colorado after graduation, and currently works as an assistant athletic director at CU, and also hosts a radio talk show with another former Buff quarterback, Joel Klatt.

Q: What one moment sticks out in your mind from the 1990 season?

A: For me, the point that was a threshold, a watershed moment, was halftime of the Missouri game. I had started and played the whole first half. We had some success, but perhaps not as much as we would have had with Darian. We started the second half with Darian under center, and he was ineffective because of his shoulder. Coach (Gary) Barnett did some incredible shrink work at that moment when they were thinking about putting me back in. He told me to keep my head in the game because I'd have to go back in and win it. That was my own personal trial that I had to overcome.

Q: You've said that moment was "emblematic" of the whole season. How so?

A: We just had to overcome so many things that year. We had a rough start when we went 1-1-1. We didn't even have Eric (Bieniemy) in the first game, and Mike Pritchard played great. Kanavis (McGhee) had a shoulder injury in the national championship game, and Paul Rose came in and had a terrific game. There were just moments like that all year long."

Q: Missouri folks still claim you didn't score on the final play of the game. What do you remember about that play?

A: We're maybe a smidgen inside the 1-yard line, and I tell myself, 'We've got this big offensive line and we're going to get some movement.' The one mistake I could make was to run lateral. I wanted to go north as soon as possible. As soon as I faked the handoff, I got north. If I would've run the option the way Hagan would've run it, I would have walked into the end zone. But I didn't want to get tripped up. I was sure I got across the line; I remember seeing it under me. But there was a split second when the action stopped and it was like the whole world stopped. My heart, everything. When the official finally threw his hands up, I jumped up and ran.

Q: Players have said center Jay Leeuwenburg is the one Buff who knew CU had an extra down. Do you remember it that way?

A: To my knowledge, there was only one Colorado football guy in the stadium who was 100 percent sure what was going on. In the huddle, Leeuwenburg kept saying, 'C.J., we can't do that.' I had no idea what the heck he was talking about, but he kept saying, 'C.J., it's third down, not second. We don't have three plays left.' I'm trying to implore the guys to get ready and get back in the huddle as quickly as possible after the next play, and Jay is saying, 'We can't do that.' Finally, I tell Jay to shut the hell up and focus, and he shrugs and says, 'OK, let's go.'

Q: Was Bill McCartney as great of a motivational speaker as he was reputed to be?

A: He was better than advertised. He was always on the cusp of humor. The thing about Mac was that he was so on the edge that sometimes he occasionally lost us. Once in a while he would cross that line and we'd start laughing -- and he knew he's lost us. So he'd just throw in a couple more things and send us out there. But he was a tremendous motivational speaker.

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1990 flashback:

A look back at Colorado's 1990 national championship season: CU 33, Missouri 31

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer **First down:** Johnson spike, 28 seconds |
Boulder Daily Camera

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Editor's note: *This is the sixth in a season-long series on Colorado's march to the 1990 national championship. The Camera will recap each week's game and catch up with a player from the title team every Friday during the 2010 season.*

One of the ironies of the 1990 Colorado Buffaloes' championship season is that their most memorable game wasn't the championship game.

Knowledgeable college football fans remember that Colorado beat Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl that season to win the national title.

Hard-core fans remember that Notre Dame had a punt return for a touchdown by Raghib "Rocket" Ismail called back by a clipping penalty in that game.

But even casual college football fans remember that earlier in the 1990 season, Colorado beat Missouri in the final seconds of the game by scoring a touchdown on fifth down.

It was the sixth straight game of CU's season that came down to the final minutes.

"It's part of college football lore," said Buff quarterback Charles Johnson, who sneaked across from the 1-yard line for the winning score. "People don't remember what happened the rest of the game, even though it was a great game. They might not remember anything about that season -- but they know about the fifth down."

Since then, countless trees have been sacrificed to produce the newsprint required to rehash the game on a regular basis.

The topic has resurfaced with a vengeance this year. Not only is it the 20th anniversary of the game, but the two teams will meet again -- in Columbia -- just three days past the exact 20th anniversary of the Oct. 6, 1990, contest.

Thus, newspapers in Missouri and Colorado -- including the Camera -- have dedicated huge swaths of space looking back at one of college football's most-famous (and infamous) moments.

In those stories, former CU coach Bill McCartney has apologized for trying to shift the focus of the game to what he believed were unacceptable playing conditions. Former center Jay Leeuwenburg has said he doesn't believe Johnson actually crossed the goal line on the final play. Former Missouri coaches have said they still refuse to accept the outcome.

And everyone with any connection to either team continues to argue whether the Buffs should have "accepted" the win.

But as Johnson noted, what is seldom remembered is that it was a terrific college football game from the opening quarter.

CU's Eric Bieniemy ran for 217 yards and a touchdown. CU's Mike Pritchard carried the ball once -- for a 68-yard touchdown -- and also caught a 70-yard touchdown pass. Johnson completed a career-high 10 of 18 passes for 151 yards, while Missouri's Kent Kiefer threw for 326 yards and three touchdowns.

The game was tied three times (7-7, 14-14 and 24-24), and the lead changed hands five times.

And, lost in the brouhaha over the final play is the fact that Johnson directed the Buffs on a 15-play, 88-yard drive to get to the end zone. The drive included an 18-yard scramble by Johnson, a 22-yard completion to Rico Smith on third-and-10 and a 15-yard run by Bieniemy.

That all set the stage for the famous fifth down.

For the record, with CU holding a first-and-10 from the Missouri 3-yard line:

First down: Johnson spike, 28 seconds left on the clock.

Second down: Bieniemy rush to 1-yard line. CU calls timeout with 18 seconds remaining.

Third down: After timeout - and with everyone thinking it's still second down - Bieniemy rush for 0 yards and clock stopped momentarily with 8 seconds showing.

Fourth down: Johnson spike with :02 on clock.

Fifth down: Johnson 1-yard touchdown run.

"That's what people remember," Johnson said. "Honestly, I think if we'd known we had just two plays after the timeout, we still would have scored. Then people would remember that it was a great game."

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CU Buff Josh Hartigan roars onto scene

Buff DE goes from scout team to impact player

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Josh Hartigan is finally in the spotlight.

Colorado's starting left defensive end produced two sacks, a third-down stop and forced a fumble during last Saturday's 29-27 victory over Georgia at Folsom Field.

Not bad for a talented guy who was toiling away on the scout team during for the better part of three years.

"It was definitely exciting," Hartigan said of his breakout game. "Being able to work through everything and stick with it and then go out and get my first sack on such a big stage in front of a whole bunch of people against a really good team was great."

It's the kind of story coaches love.

Hartigan, who had never left the state of Florida until arriving at CU in January of 2007, was projected as a linebacker, a positioning group the Buffs were actually fairly deep at in recent seasons. And so the 200-pound freshman redshirted, played some special teams and was designated as a defensive lineman on the scout team.

"I've played it and nobody likes to play it. It's no fun," head coach Dan Hawkins said. "Some guys go to the scout team and go silent, others roar like a lion."

Hartigan let his play in practice do the talking. Or perhaps the roaring.

"We can't block this guy," offensive line coach Denver Johnson noted.

It soon became obvious to the entire staff and team that Hartigan -- whose father Sterling Palmer played defensive end for the Washington Redskins -- was a natural pass rusher.

"It started with him changing his attitude and mindset and deciding to go 100 miles per hour every play on the scout team," defensive line coach Romeo Bandison said. "He was making our offense miserable. He just looked like a natural with his hand on the ground."

Hartigan made his debut on the defensive line during the Buffs' victory over Kansas last season. He was on the field for 71 plays but finished the 2009 campaign with only three tackles, which is how many he had against the Bulldogs.

"He has always been a great pass rusher. I think he just has that in him," linebacker B.J. Beatty said. "He has a motor that always runs and he is a relentless pass rusher. That second sack (against Georgia) happened because he just ran through a guy."

Entering the season, CU's defensive line -- which also includes Marquez Herrod at right defensive end and Curtis Cunningham, Will Pericak and Nick Kasa inside -- didn't get a lot of attention. The assumption outside the gates of the practice field was that the unit was a weak link on a defense that features Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown at cornerback and Beatty, Jon Major and Michael Sipili at linebacker.

"They don't get the big headlines or anything," Beatty said of CU's front four. "But they put in the hard work and get the job done."

Hartigan, who has only added 20 pounds to his 6-foot-1 frame over the last three years, certainly earned some respect from Georgia. He already had it from the Buffs' big offensive line.

"I think I've seen improvement each year from Josh. It's a little harder to block him now," left tackle Nate Solder said. "He has great quickness off the ball and it's hard to get your hands on him."

A lot of players transfer when it becomes clear that they aren't going to be starting early in their collegiate careers or might be asked to change positions. Hartigan said he stuck with CU and embraced his role on the scout team because his mom wanted him to leave Boulder with a degree.

"You can never give up on guys and you can never tell how a guy is going to develop as time goes on," defensive coordinator Ron Collins said. "It's part of the maturation process for these kids. It's just a thing where some guys learn and mature at a different pace."

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