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Buffs feeling pressure to win

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BOULDER — For a team that hasn't posted a winning season in four years, Week 3 hardly seems like a "must-win" week.

The University of Colorado football team is feeling the pressure, however.

Today, CU (1-1) will host Hawaii (1-1) at Folsom Field in Boulder.

"Oh, we need it," senior receiver Scotty McKnight said. "We need to go out here and play our game. Is it a make-or-break on the season? No, because there's 10-plus games left. But I think it's big."

That may be an understatement.

Even the biggest Buffs supporters probably predicted them at 1-1 at this point in the season. But it was how CU got to 1-1 that has Buffs Nation up in arms this week.

In Week 1, CU looked solid in a 24-3 win over rival Colorado State. The Buffs followed that, however, with an embarrassing 52-7 loss at Cal last week.

CU head coach Dan Hawkins had pressure on him before the season even began. The heat was turned up this week, however.

Local talk radio shows, which normally spend 90 percent of their time talking about the Denver Broncos, spent time this week discussing potential replacements for Hawkins. Can Bill McCartney come back? What about Eric Bieniemy? Dave Logan?

Unless there's a dramatic performance change soon, the fans are ready for a change at the top.

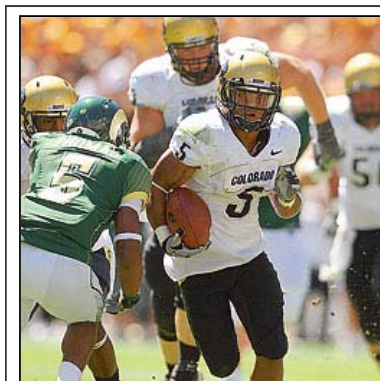
There's no question this is a big one.

Hawkins needs this game. He is 17-34 at CU and simply can't afford to have a non-ranked opponent from the Western Athletic Conference come into Boulder and beat his team. All signs point to him needing a winning season to keep his job for 2011. Lose today, and the chances for a winning season drop dramatically.

The team needs this game, too. Once this one is over, the Buffs take a week off before hosting perennial national power Georgia. The last thing CU needs is to stew over two straight losses for the next two weeks.

"It would really help us out in terms of positive momentum going into the following week," McKnight said.

CU's fans needs this one, too. Today is supposed to be a special day, with former Buffs great Alfred Williams being honored at halftime. Even with that, several thousand tickets remain unsold because fans aren't ready to buy into this



CU's Rodney Stewart carries the ball in the second quarter against CSU Sept. 4 at Invesco Field at Mile High. The Buffs will face Hawaii today at Folsom Field in Boulder. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

team.

A loss today could cause the Buffs to lose even more fans. A win? Well, that could win some back.

"I think if we come out here and perform well and get a win in our first home game ... and people can see we look like a better unit, they'll get a little more excited about it and we can slowly start chipping away and getting (fans) back on our side," McKnight said.

This week, the Buffs have done everything right in trying to rebound on the field and get the fans on their side again. They practiced well. They kept their heads up. They also insisted they are no longer thinking about what happened at Cal.

Players and coaches were very encouraged by how the team practiced early this week. Of course, they also felt they practiced well leading up to the Cal game, and that didn't get the Buffs anywhere.

"We just have to go out there and do it on Saturday," offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said. "That's the bridge we have to cross right now. The meetings are sharp; the practices are sharp. Now it's got to translate to Saturday afternoon."

On the plus side, there's no better place for the Buffs to be as they try get back on track.

"It's way easier to play here," McKnight said of Folsom Field. "I've played in a lot of different places, and obviously I'm a little biased, but I love coming to play here."

In some respects, today is set up perfectly for the Buffs to get a win. They're at home. They're motivated. And they've potentially got their season on the line.

With all that in mind, how the Buffs perform will tell a lot about this team.

"They're going to bring their A game," receiver Travon Patterson said of Hawaii. "We have to bring our A game as well. If we come in here and play our game, do what the coaches tell us to do and execute the plays, we'll be all right."

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Regents delay plan for committee to oversee CU athletics

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/18/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

The University of Colorado regents may form a committee that will give more attention to the athletic department. The proposal was presented at a regents meeting Friday and has been tabled until November.

The committee will not have anything to do regarding a review of the on-field performance of coaches.

"From an academic or budgetary perspective, athletics is probably about 2 percent of what the university does," regent Michael Carrigan said. "However, our athletic programs seem to get about 50 percent of the public's attention. For this reason, perhaps it deserves more of the regents' attention as well."

Carrigan said some of the goals of the

committee would be exploring finances of various departments to determine if they're profitable, ways the regents can help with fundraising and whether the Colorado-Denver campus should start an athletics program.

Also, if the committee had formed before summer began, the regents could be more instrumental regarding the school's current negotiations with the Big 12 over its exit fee.

Friday's meeting came one day before Colorado's home football game with Hawaii. Coach Dan Hawkins is 17-34 in his fifth year. There is widespread speculation that this could be his final season unless the team's fortunes turn around soon.

Carrigan said the Hawkins' situation has nothing to do with why the regents are looking at being more involved in athletics. "This was an issue raised before the football season started," he said. "It encompasses much broader issues."

Many issues must still be determined before a committee is formed. Regent Steve Bosley made the motion to table the discussion for that reason. The committee would not oversee athletic director Mike Bohn.

"He'd still report to the chancellor, and no one suggests that change," Carrigan said.

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cu vs. hawaii

Bufs have a lot to prove against Warriors today

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/18/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT



Bryant Moniz has put the punch back in Hawaii's wide-open passing game. (Eugene Tanner, The Associated Press)

BOULDER — It doesn't take tea leaves — or access to the private thoughts of Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn — to know that anything shy of a convincing victory today over

visiting Hawaii would render an uncertain future for the Buffaloes' season and the coaching staff.

This is a crossroads game for the Buffs. The psyche of the team, bowl aspirations and Dan Hawkins' job security are on the line this afternoon at Folsom Field.

Overdramatizing the situation? Perhaps. This is only the third game. But the Buffs come off a 52-7 debacle in Berkeley to an unranked California team picked to finish seventh in a conference soon to be Colorado's future home. Could any enthusiasm for this season remain if the Buffs fail to take care of business in their home opener?

All could be lost if Colorado bumbles and fumbles around again.

"A lot of people would probably say no, but I think it is (a must-win)," said CU senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight, a team captain. "I think we need to come out here and win. We need to gain back support from our fans. I think that people are generally down on the team."

McKnight said the Buffs not only need a victory, they need style points.

"I think if we come out and perform well, don't look sloppy and look like a better unit," he said, "then the fans will get more excited about it, and we can slowly chip away and get people back on our side."

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As CU junior quarterback Tyler Hansen said this week, the team just needs to do its thing and play football.

But how can Colorado players relax with so much seemingly hanging in the balance?

It's a good thing this involves 19- and 20-year-olds.

"We're still a confident football team," Hansen said. "We're 1-1. It's not like we're 0-8. That (blowout loss to Cal) was the second game of the year. We still have 10 games left on our schedule. There is a lot of football left. We're OK."

Hawaii (1-1) will be a test, mind you. More impressive than the Warriors' 31-28 victory last weekend at Army was Hawaii's effort the previous week in a 49-36 loss to Southern Cal. Against a youthful but still talented Trojans squad, Hawaii amassed 31 first downs (to 25 for SC) and 588 yards of offense (to 524 for the Trojans).

Bottom line: Colorado had better score more than the 24 points it mustered against an inexperienced Colorado State team in the season opener.

"We know we have to sustain drives and score points because Hawaii's offense is so dynamic," McKnight said.

The Warriors have plenty of team speed, and for

decades, players from the islands have been known for their tenacity. They take delight in finishing every play.

Nobody loves the game of football more than those with Polynesian blood. And they don't mind leaving some on the turf.

Expect an opening flurry by Hawaii, if not a kick in the teeth. Colorado reacted poorly to the initial barrage by Cal that came in the form of pass rushers carrying a nasty attitude. Hawaii quarterback Bryant Moniz might try to set the tempo today by throwing 12 consecutive passes.

"I expect them to come out on fire," McKnight said of the Warriors. "There is something about the nature of playing in Hawaii; they all have a motor."


As for Colorado, the Buffs need a Toney Clemons and Travon Patterson sighting. Billed as home run threats, this pair hasn't provided much punch thus far. Both average about 10 yards a catch. Of course, it has been difficult for Hansen to get the ball to the speedy transfers while running for his life.

"The first two games, we haven't hit any long ones," McKnight said. "I know we're going to start to. It's a matter of time before that happens."

That time had better be now.

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cu football

CU Buffs' offensive line eager to make amends

By Chris Dempsey
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/17/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 09/17/2010 01:04:30 AM MDT



Buff's quarterback Tyler Hansen bobbles the snap as pressure from Cal's defensive front moves in during last Saturday's game. (Jed Jacobsohn, Getty Images)

BOULDER — The beating that Colorado's offensive line took last Saturday at Cal didn't

stop when the beleaguered unit walked off the California Memorial Stadium field. It continued on talk shows and message boards, on Facebook and Twitter, on campus and yes, even in the Buffaloes' own locker room.

But now, those players vow to fight back into the good graces of all of those who, before the season, touted the size, strength and experience of the offensive front as perhaps CU's best unit.

"We have to come off, do your job, take the fight to them, really hit them in the mouth, not wait to feel what it's like," junior Mike Ittis said.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins spent the week not only tweaking his offensive line

but reinforcing the principles of protecting the quarterback after Tyler Hansen was harassed throughout the 52-7 loss at Cal, which included six sacks and several hurries.

"Some of it is the quarterback getting rid of it," Hawkins said. "Some of it is the protection schemes."

The Buffs spent ample practice time on both this week. Hawkins shuffled players, sliding Ittis from left guard to center, where he has played before, and moving junior Ethan Adkins back into the starting lineup at left guard, where he was to start the season. Colorado's depth on the line allows for coaches to mix and match multiple players to find the right fit, and chances are the tinkering won't stop Saturday if there are more

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protection issues.

After the personnel moves came a refresher course on the protection scheme. All quarterbacks need a pocket to pass from, and the Buffs' linemen aim to give Hansen one. So the pyramid of accountability goes as follows:

If the linemen are pushed back into the pocket and Hansen is sacked, it's the line's responsibility. If Hansen's drop is too deep and the rush ends, who are pushed outward, end up meeting him at a point 8 to 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage, it's on Hansen to step up in the pocket to avoid the sack.

Having the running backs do a better job of protection against the blitz is key, and that was drilled as well. In short, if Colorado is to remedy this problem, it's going to take major improvement in cohesion and communication across the board on offense.

"It's always easier said than done," Itlis said. "But anything that is easy isn't really worth doing."

Hawaii's defense could give the Buffs offensive line a chance to find its footing, if they play strong. The Warriors' defense is allowing 233.0 yards rushing per game, though that number is skewed a bit because Hawaii faced run-heavy Army last week.

Penalties have stalled several CU drives this season. The Buffs have been whistled seven times for illegal procedure, twice for holding and

twice for illegal blocks.

"We have to minimize the mistakes that are killing us," Itlis said. "We can't get a 6-yard gain brought back with a chop block."

As for the heat they've taken this week, some of those on the CU offensive line bristle. Itlis, however, said ignoring anything that isn't coming from a teammate is the way they'll proceed.


"We have critics in the media, we have critics in the fans, critics in the alumni, critics here, critics there and as far as I'm concerned, I can care less what any of them have to say," Itlis said. "When it comes down to it, it's the criticism from your teammates that really needs to motivate you, not from outside."

At practice this week players reported seeing a more aggressive attitude from the line. Wide receiver Scotty McKnight, whose production depends on a quarterback who has enough time to deliver the football said: "They are sick, whether it be guys in the locker room or people on the outside saying it's their fault. It's never solely on one position, but I think that did get under their skin a little bit, and they want to let Tyler feel comfortable in the pocket and let the team know they are going to do their job."

Hansen dismissed the notion he has lost faith in the guys up front just two games into the season.

"Those guys are great guys," Hansen said. "They

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want to win as much as I do. They'll get better."

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How the CU offense rates

Colorado's offense has sputtered out of the gate this season. Here's where it ranks in various statistical categories among FBS teams:

Category Avg. Rank
Sacks per game allowed 4.0 T-113
Rushing yards 94.0 103
Passing yards 179.0 T-85
Total yards 273.0 111
Scoring offense (points) 15.5 T-108

Three questions for Colorado

1. Can Colorado's offensive line give quarterback Tyler Hansen some protection? Hansen admitted to making mistakes Saturday in the loss at Cal. But for the most part, he didn't have much of a chance. California pass rushers were in the Buffs' backfield all afternoon. Hansen was sacked six times, and it looked worse. CU's offensive line was supposed to be a strength of the team this year. It's time to show it.

2. Can CU's defense prevent Hawaii's run-and-shoot offense from dictating momentum and field position? It must have been frightening for CU defensive coaches to show film of Hawaii accumulating 588 yards in the 49-36 loss to Southern Cal. USC may not be USC this season, but the Trojans have athletes. Hawaii made them

look silly at times, with three players receiving more than 100 yards. CU's defense must be aggressive. If the Buffs lay back on their heels, Warriors quarterback Bryant Moniz will carve them up.

3. Will CU put on a performance that will make Buffs legend and Saturday honoree Alfred Williams proud? When was the last time Colorado looked really sharp for four quarters? The 38-17 victory over Colorado State in the 2008 opener, perhaps? In any case, it has been awhile.

Tom Kensler, *The Denver Post*

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