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colorado football

CU quarterback Nick Hirschman getting back into action in time for Buffaloes' opener

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Just in the Nick of time.

How worrisome for Colorado could this scenario have been? With Saturday's season opener at Hawaii fast approaching, time was running out for Colorado's top backup quarterback, Nick Hirschman, to get back on the practice field after missing almost two weeks with a high ankle sprain.

A redshirt freshman with lots of learning to do, Hirschman finally put on full pads last Monday. Had Hirschman remained hobbled, CU might have been forced to send a true freshman walk-on (John Schrock) into this weekend's game if starter Tyler Hansen got hurt.

Wearing a protective boot, Hirschman sat out Colorado's first two intrasquad scrimmages. One could almost hear CU coaches exhale a sigh of "Whew" when he returned to practice.

"Nick needed to be back," Colorado quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer said last week. "He's moving around pretty good. He fell off a little bit with the time he was away. But he's a smart kid, and he's getting it back quickly."

No CU quarterback other than Hansen has taken a college snap. Fortunately, Hirschman has had more reps than most redshirt freshmen. The 6-foot-3, 230-pound Californian enrolled early at Colorado (January 2010) and has gone through two springs with the Buffaloes.

"I'm back up to speed, no problem," Hirschman said after a recent two-hour practice, although his ankle got a bit sore.

Hirschman said he tried to use the down time wisely.

"It was very beneficial. I was able to get into the playbook a lot more than I would have been able to. I really got into the film. I got a real hard grasp of the offense."

Hirschman finished strong during the spring, completing 11-of-19 passes in the spring game for 170 yards and two touchdowns, with no interceptions.

Scherer said Hirschman continues to navigate the learning curve and isn't about to fall off.

"Nick really left spring on a high note, and he took a quantum leap from that time to when we got together for (August) camp," Scherer said. "He's shown a lot of growth. He just gets better

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every day.

"He got a bit out of whack (earlier in the spring), but Trent (Dilfer) worked with him and kind of got the tires back on the road."

Dilfer, a former Fresno State and pro quarterback, is an NFL analyst for ESPN. Nearing the end of his NFL career, Dilfer played for the Cleveland Browns in 2005 when Scherer began a four-year stint there as quarterbacks coach. Dilfer and Scherer remain close friends.

Hirschman said Dilfer lives "about 10 minutes away" in the Bay Area of Northern California and they first got together when Hirschman was a sophomore at Los Gatos High School. Hirschman's father built Dilfer's custom-made house, hence the connection.

"Trent taught me about everything I know about being a quarterback," Hirschman said.

Scherer, out of a job with the Carolina Panthers when current Broncos coach John Fox was not retained, tells the story about letting Dilfer know he was pursuing a college job.

"I told Trent that I couldn't say which college it was," Scherer recalled. "Finally he got it out of me. When I said, 'It's Colorado,' he said, 'Colorado? That's my guy: Nick Hirschman. I've worked with Nick.'"

"Trent is one of the people I most respect about quarterback play, and he is very high, very bullish on Nick."

That's not to say Hirschman isn't a work in progress. Scherer said he first viewed Hirschman as being "really raw," and it was obvious that he had not developed as quickly as they would have liked while primarily toiling on the CU scout team as a redshirt.

"But Nick has tremendous upside," Scherer added. "I'm really encouraged and pleased with

his progress. I'm comfortable with the fact that I think we have two potentially very solid quarterbacks."

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college football

CU Buffs eye ... The Warriors

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For the record: It's the season opener for both teams. In 2010, Hawaii was 10-4, 7-1 in the Western Athletic Conference (tied for first).

Streaking: Last season, the Warriors won nine of their final 10 regular-season games before a 6 2-35 loss to Tulsa in the Hawaii Bowl.

Who's hot: Aided by a spread offense, senior quarterback Bryant Moniz was statistically the nation's top passer in 2010 with 5,040 yards and 39 TDs.

Who's not: Hawaii must rebuild its offense line and needs replacements at running back and wide receiver.

Key stat: 9 — Number of total returning starters.

FYI: Last year at Folsom Field, Hawaii led 10-0 at halftime and then, perhaps getting worn down and feeling the altitude, the Warriors were outscored 31-3 by Colorado in the second half.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

AUGUST 29, 2011, 8:55 AM

CU practicing late to acclimate for Saturday's later kickoff in Hawaii

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Colorado coach Jon Embree isn't as much into visualization philosophy and techniques as his predecessor, Dan Hawkins. But Embree is well aware of jet lag and one's body clock.

So it should come as no surprise that, for Saturday's opener at Hawaii, the Buffs will be flying a day early for that game, on Thursday, rather than the customary Friday travel schedule.

Also, Colorado has pushed back its practices today, Tuesday and Wednesday to 6-8 p.m. (instead of 4-6 p.m.), in order to get the team acclimated to a later schedule. Walk-throughs in Hawaii also will be in the evening.

Kickoff in Honolulu will be 4:15 p.m. local time. That translates to 8:15 p.m. Mountain.

"We'll practice at night so the players get used to running around at that time," Embree said. "We'll go on their time and do what we do."

No touristy team trips to Pearl Harbor or Waikiki Beach are on the agenda, Embree said.

"It's all business," Embree said. "(The players) can see (the part of Hawaii) where we take off and land. We're there for one reason."

Embree said he does not anticipate the later start to be a factor.

"If it was midnight back here, I could see it being a factor," he said. "But this will be just like playing a night game here."

Practices are closed to the public, including the media.

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CU Buffs hoping to be road warriors in Hawaii

Jon Embree's squad eyes end to losing streak that began in 2007

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:08/28/2011 05:33:14 PM MDT

There have been worse losing streaks in college football history.

Northwestern lost a record 34 consecutive games from 1979-82. More locally, Colorado State lost 26 games from 1960-63.

In 2007, Navy ended a 43-game losing streak to Notre Dame. It wasn't easy. The Midshipmen finally sunk the Irish, 46-44, in triple overtime.

So Colorado's 17-game road losing streak -- 18 straight out-of-state losses if you thrown in the 2007 Independence Bowl defeat against Alabama -- isn't the most unpalatable streak in the sport.

It just tastes that way in the Buffs' locker room, especially for the seniors that have been talking about it for years now.

"That's a big issue that revolves around this program," starting quarterback and team captain Tyler Hansen said. "It's a distraction. Guys are thinking about it. I think the sooner you can get that over with, the better for the team. Starting right off the bat going to Hawaii is a good thing for us."

The Buffs have a chance to say aloha to the skid this Saturday in the 2011 opener at Hawaii (8:15 p.m., ESPN2).

"We're Colorado, we don't care. We could go play down the street in the parking lot," offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said. "The bottom line is we want to make sure the guys getting on the plane understand the purpose of why we're taking that trip."

CU kicks off a brutal schedule, which includes seven true road games and the Colorado State game at Sports Authority Field in Denver, in Honolulu. The Buffs also play true road games at Ohio State, Stanford, Washington, Arizona State, UCLA and Utah.

The last CU road victory was on Oct. 27, 2007, at Texas Tech. The Buffs beat the Red Raiders 31-26 in Lubbock during Dan Hawkins' second season.

Hansen was a senior in high school that fall. Greg Henderson, one of CU's starting cornerbacks this season, was 14-years old.

Five players currently on the roster made the trip to Lubbock. Ryan Miller started, and Brian Lockridge also played in the game. Jason Espinoza, Matt Bahr, and Josh Hartigan all made the trip but did not participate.

"I remember the fight song," Miller said. "That's about it."

The Buffs always sing the fight song on the flight home after a big win. The team charter has been an uncomfortably silent place in recent years.

"I don't know what it is. I came from high school where we won four road games in a row and then went undefeated my senior season," senior tight end Ryan Deehan said. "I wasn't used to losing coming here, and to lose all these games ... I'm just ready to get this done."

The veteran players have been through a lot, including a coaching change last season. The new staff is determined to change the road culture as soon as possible.

"Last year we didn't expect to win. I think that's the biggest thing the (new) coaches saw on film. Things went wrong and it was like, 'Oh, here we go again,' " Hansen said. "That's the biggest thing is we need to have confidence throughout the game."

Last November the Buffs were dominating Kansas in Lawrence. The visitors were leading by 28 points early in the fourth quarter.

But the Jayhawks scored 35 unanswered points to pull out a 52-45 win. In 121 years of football, CU had never coughed up a 28-point lead.

"We were never in that situation before. That lead was getting a little too comfortable," said Hansen, who made the trip but did not play due to injury. "I was on the sideline doing my signal stuff and I thought the game was in hand. I was just as comfortable as everyone.

"I think that's one thing Embree is talking about when we do live game situations, if the offense is doing great you must step on their throats and keep driving. It might be 45-17, but let's keep scoring."

Following the epic collapse, Dan Hawkins was fired. Interim head coach Brian Cabral immediately brought back some old traditions to the locker room and restored some pride with back-to-back home wins over Iowa State and Kansas State.

But in CU's final Big 12 road game the team was drubbed 45-17 by Nebraska. The Buffs finished one win shy of bowl eligibility, and the season ended with a miserable trip back from Lincoln.

"We've got something to prove on the road," Cabral said. "The sooner, the better."

Aloha Stadium is located approximately 3,324 miles from Boulder. If the Buffs don't win it will feel like a flight to Mars.

Perhaps the team is fortunate that there isn't a highway to Honolulu.

"We've lost 18 on the road. Maybe we need to start taking buses," Embree said. "I'm excited that our first game is on the road, because I want to get that over with. I want to get it over with."

Embree will place a brick on the wall inside the Dal Ward Center with the score engraved in it if CU prevails against Hawaii.

"We want to get that first win for Embree. We don't want him to start off 0-1 as a head coach, we want him to be 1-0," Hansen said. "The next week that 2001 team is coming back and we want those bricks to be back up there for them. That would be real special. ...

"We have a lot to play for this season. This group has gone through a lot. And I think we want to get that road win done with and the streak in the past."

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