

Blacken has CU Buffs focused on bowl game

Buff's asking for more in strength, conditioning workouts

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When Colorado football players returned to campus last month from four weeks of holiday vacation, strength and conditioning coach Malcolm Blacken wasted no time bringing them up to speed on the program's new two-word mantra that he expects will motivate them for the next year of their lives.

Bowl game.

It's the phrase players use to break the huddle following every run and weight-lifting session this winter in the offseason conditioning program.

"The guys came back with one thing in mind and we've already started talking about it, and that's bowl game," Blacken said. "You've got to get your mind, your thoughts, your training around to that cause that's what it's all about.

"We don't want to be sitting home in December and January. We don't. It's too much time off for us when we see other teams playing in the big bowl games and we haven't practiced in four or five weeks. That's weird and it should be. If you go about your day and never give that a second thought, then there is something wrong with you and we've done a poor job explaining what our goals are."

Veteran players and coach Jon Embree first set the goal for next season at no less than a bowl game in the week after the 2011 season ended with the program's first road victory since 2007. CU hasn't been to a bowl game since losing to Alabama in the Independence Bowl in December of 2007. It hasn't won a bowl game since Gary Barnett's 2004 team beat UTEP in the Houston Bowl.

Blacken said players have embraced the bowl game motto and he has been impressed by how they have attacked the offseason program, which is based around different position groups competing against each other for the second consecutive year.

He said they have asked him to push them and give them more. He said after years as a strength coach in the NFL where teaching points are few for a strength coach, the experience has "calibrated" him.

The Buffs work out in three groups on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and they run as a team on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He said one of his goals for the winter program is identifying team leaders. He said he already knows who a few are, but he is not naming names because he wants everyone to have a chance to prove themselves as a leader before he identifies them publicly.

"I'm trying to get some of the young guys to see this is their team, too," he said.

There are various times when the leadership he's looking for emerges. It can be how players react to a teammate being late, and it can be who pushes the team through when Blacken hits them with a particularly brutal workout.

"I'm a screamer and a hollerer when I need to be, but sometimes I just shut up cause I want to see them run on their own gas," Blacken said. "It's not always up to me. I'm on the sideline with a baseball hat, chewing gum and they're playing Oregon. I need to know who are the leaders? It can't always come from me and the motivation can't always come from coach Embree.

"It's got to come from inside that huddle."

Blacken said he hasn't made any dramatic changes to the types and styles of workouts he uses. He said his experience has taught him what works and what doesn't. Having gone through a season with almost every player he's working with has him better prepared for this offseason than he was last year when he took over a program in which he had no real

knowledge of players' capabilities.

He said one issue he has discovered over the course of the last year is that shoulder strength and flexibility were lacking. He said he believes that played a part in a high number of players dealing with shoulder problems last season.

"I call the shoulder and neck region your shock absorbers," Blacken said. "I'm going to train those shock absorbers as much as I possibly can from now until we play our first game cause I want them as strong as possible. It's not like I neglected them last year, but I didn't know it was a problem before."

The winter portion of the offseason program ends just before spring football begins March 10.

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