



*CU coach Jon Embree converses with a pair of Pac-12 officials.
Photo Courtesy: Associated Press*



Brooks: Utes Have Rebounded While Buffs Floundered

Release: 11/21/2011 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - Eight games ago, Utah was 0-3 in its debut Pac-12

Conference season and seemed headed on a path similar to another first-year league member. But while Colorado continued to plummet, the Utes, despite entering November 1-4 in the league, righted themselves and now are in what once seemed the highly improbable position of winning the South Division.

For that to happen, Utah first must defeat CU on Friday (1:30 p.m. MST, Rice-Eccles Stadium) then get an assist from Southern California and California. The Utes need California to defeat slumping Arizona State later Friday, then must have a USC win against UCLA on Saturday, thus earning Utah a spot in the first Pac-12 championship game.

Given that scenario and the Utes celebrating Senior Day, CU coach Jon Embree knows the Buffs will encounter an emotionally charged situation similar to what they faced last weekend against UCLA.

And that didn't turn out so well; CU fell behind 21-0 and left Pasadena thoroughly embarrassed (45-6). Embree said Utah will be playing with a "heightened sense of urgency . . . it'll be their best game."

Whether the Buffs can match the Utes' fervor - which CU didn't do against UCLA - isn't up for discussion: "We'll have to do it, we don't have a choice," Embree said. "We'll have to play with urgency. As I said at the Rose Bowl, we have to understand that the first quarter, it's going to be a whole different sense of urgency, energy, passion,

whatever the word is, from the other team. And if you don't match it, you're down just like 21-0."

Embree tipped his hat to Utah for showing resiliency after losing starting quarterback Jordan Wynn in early October and dropping its first three conference games.

"They went through a lot of adversity," Embree said. "You look at how they win - a goal line stand last week and a fake punt for a touchdown. That's the difference against Washington State (a 30-27 win in overtime). You look at UCLA - that was a tight one for a while, then they were able to put them away (31-6). They've done a good job of competing and fighting all the way through it and finding a way to make good things happen for them."

Utah demolished UCLA two weekends ago in Salt Lake City to claim that head-to-head tiebreaker if both schools finish 5-4 in league play. UCLA is 5-3, while Utah and ASU are 4-4. The Sun Devils - losers of three straight and four of their past five games - own the head-to-head tiebreaker against the Utes, but not the Bruins.

Utah is 7-4 overall and one of seven bowl-eligible Pac-12 teams. The Utes' fourth consecutive victory might have been their most difficult; they outlasted the Cougars in overtime on Saturday after squandering a pair of 10-point leads in regulation.

But that type of resiliency is what coach Kyle Whittingham has come to expect from his team. "We dropped four games in a row and could have said that was it," he said. "We fought back, and the guys continued to battle and work hard. It's a process that went on, and we never panicked and stayed the course. We're 4-4, it's still not where we want to be, but we've made a lot of progress."

On the other hand, CU's progress has been minimal, with a lack of confidence and overall consistency the biggest stumbling blocks, according to Embree. "I feel like they've been motivated," he said. "I think it's getting them to believe they can go do it. Consistency - that's been the biggest issue with us."

BUFFS GO BOWLING IN THE ROSE BOWL: After their 39-point loss to UCLA, several CU players said they opened the game "flat" - which puzzled Embree. He said he and his staff are "trying to create as much enthusiasm and energy as we can as coaches . . . I'm getting accused of being too over the top."

The CU coaches attempted to create a different atmosphere for their night in the Rose Bowl, telling the players it was their bowl game. "So how do you get flat for your own bowl game?" Embree asked. "To me that's just an excuse. So I don't know how to explain (some of the Buffs saying they were flat).

"The locker room felt like it did before Arizona, like it did before Washington State, Cal . . . a lot of games. At some point, *you* have to be excited to go play. No one can make you be excited. If it's important to you, no one is going to make you have that sense of urgency. If you come out flat, then it's not important enough to you."

Embree said adversity in some form is to be expected in every game, so he discounted the notion that his players would become deflated if they give up an early score or two - which nonetheless has happened with regularity this season.

He said it was hard for him to address what past CU teams' mindsets might have been, but added, "To me that's just an excuse. Every game you're going to have something happen . . . Against SC everything went right in the first quarter (the Buffs and Trojans were tied 7-7 after one), so what was their excuse then?

"You can't blame it on being flat . . . you have to play for four quarters. And if you're going to play for four quarters, you're not going to be at a certain emotional level the whole game. It's not possible. At some point, the passion and the energy wears off and then you have to make plays. You have to trust your technique and be assignment sound.

"If you think you're going to be magically amped up like you've just run behind Ralphie for four quarters . . . it don't work that way."

LAST CALL FOR A STAIN REMOVAL: CU's final chance in 2011 to end its 23-game out-of-state losing streak is Friday. Embree calls the streak "a stain we have to get off the program. It's something we've challenged the seniors with as part of their legacy . . . it's their opportunity. It was one of the reasons we made last week like a bowl game for them, because they haven't been to a bowl.

"Eventually we'll win on the road. Like I told the seniors, this is your last chance. You don't get next year to make it right. When you look back on your time, what are you going to say? We didn't go to a bowl, we didn't win on the road? Only they can answer that question.

"We're going to do all we can to get them excited and see what happens (Friday)."

BUFF BITS: Embree said UCLA didn't spring any first-quarter surprises on his team last weekend: "It was what we had talked about; it makes it more disappointing." . . . Nick Kasa's move from defensive end/tackle to tight end is permanent, Embree said, adding, "He's coming along, showing some things in the run game. He has some work to do as a pass catcher, but that's to be understood. He's been on defense . . . but he shows good athleticism, runs well. He's pretty good at the point of attack." However, with the number of tight ends CU expects to recruit, Embree said spring ball will be "huge" for Kasa and Kyle Slavin . . . The final Pac-12 standings could feature a handful of 6-6 teams, reinforcing Embree's contention that parity reigns in the "Conference of Champions." "There are opportunities for you if you go take them," he said. "If you handle your business at home . . . certain teams when they play on the road are different teams. We just haven't gotten a full grasp of that as a team. That's something we've been preaching to them . . . but we have to take it. We haven't done a good job, and that starts with me. I've got to somehow get them to see it and understand it for the future that there's going to be opportunities." . . . CU is last in the league in scoring offense (20.0 points a game) and scoring defense (38.4) . . . The Buffs are 11th in total offense (344.1 yards a game) and total defense (453.1).

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs' Embree aims to remove 'stain'

Friday's game last chance to end road skid this season

By **Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/21/2011 07:44:00 PM MST

If Jon Embree threw his hands up in the air in disgust at this point, it wouldn't be a surprise.

The first-year Colorado coach might already have done so in private behind closed doors as he tries to figure out what he has to do to get his Buffaloes to play a complete game on the road. The truth is, several times this season on the road the Buffs appeared to mail it in, hardly putting up a fight let alone playing well in all three phases.

Embree calls the Buffs' road losing streak -- the longest in the nation at the Football Bowl Subdivision level -- "a stain on the program."

All last week Embree and his assistants talked to the Buffs about playing in the Rose Bowl against UCLA and treating the game as their bowl game this season. How did the Buffs respond? They lost 45-6 and several players emerged from the locker room talking about being flat at the start, leading to a 21-0 deficit.

"We basically as a staff made this like that was supposed to be their bowl game," Embree said Monday. "How do you get flat for your own bowl game?"

It's not the first time CU coaches have tried simple motivating tactics to try to coax a road win out of these Buffs. None of it has worked. Embree said the locker room at UCLA last week felt just like other pre-game locker rooms have this season when the Buffs have played better, including the Arizona game a week earlier when the Buffs won on senior day.

"We are trying to create as much enthusiasm and energy as we can as coaches," Embree said. "I mean, I'm getting accused of being too over the top, right?"

"... At some point, you have to be excited to go play. No one can make you be excited. If it's important to you, no one is going to make you have that sense of urgency. If you come out flat, then it's not important enough to you."

One of Embree's top priorities when the season began back in September was ending the program's road losing streak. The final week of the season has arrived and the streak is intact with the smart money on it to survive into next season.

The Buffs travel to Utah on Friday for their first game against the Utes in 49 years. The game has been dubbed "The Rumble in the Rockies" by both schools because it falls on the same weekend as other traditional rivalries around the Pac-12 Conference and the nation. If the Buffs lose this week, the next opportunity for the underclassmen on the roster to end the streak will be at Fresno State next Sept. 15 against a team that is slated to have 25 seniors next fall.

"That's a stain we have to get off the program and it's something we've challenged the seniors with, you know, this is part of your legacy. It's your opportunity," Embree said. "That's one of the reasons we made last week like a bowl game for 'em, cause (many) haven't been to a bowl."

"Eventually we'll win on the road and like I told the seniors, 'This is your last chance. You don't get next year to make it right.'"

It is the second consecutive week CU faces an opponent on its senior day and the Utes will also be playing to keep their hopes alive of representing the Pac-12 south division in the inaugural league championship game at either Oregon or Stanford.

Utah must win and both UCLA and Arizona State must lose for the Utes to advance to play for the title.

Colorado seems years away from inclusion in championship game scenarios, especially considering its dreadful

performances on the road this year. The Buffs' road losing streak stands at 23 and 24 straight losses in games played outside the state.

Embree notes the Utes have faced a lot of adversity this season, including losing their starting quarterback and starting conference play at 0-4.

"They've done a good job of competing and fighting all the way through it and finding a way to make good things happen for them," Embree said.

Two Buffs won't return

Embree said after Monday's practice that defensive back Ayodeji Olatoye and linebacker Liloa Nobriga will not return to the team next season. Both players were suspended in early October for violating team rules.

Three other defenders were suspended at the same time for similar reasons and all three have been reinstated to the team. Those players are Josh Moten, Parker Orms, and Paul Vigo.

Embree said Olatoye's and Nobriga's scholarships will be honored through the end of the spring semester. One or both could transfer at the semester break as well. Embree said is not aware of any other players who have plans to leave the program after the season.

Resilient Utes

Utah coach Kyle Whittingham gave his team some well-deserved praise Monday during his weekly press conference, noting that the Utes fought back from a 0-4 start in the Pac-12 Conference to put itself in position for a chance to win the south division.

"It has been one of the most rewarding seasons that I've had here, personally," Whittingham said. "To see a group that was down and out as far as conference play at 0-4, and to see them rebound and respond and show resiliency, that has been a pleasure to be a part of. There is not an ounce of quit in this program."

Notable

Embree said he has no previous relationship with Rich Rodriguez who was hired Monday as the next coach at Arizona. Embree said he looks forward to meeting him. ... Embree said the Buffs will practice briefly on Thanksgiving at Folsom Field before leaving around midday for Salt Lake City. He said the team probably won't visit Rice-Eccles Stadium before Friday's game.

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CU's Nick Kasa finds permanent home at tight end

Posted: 11/22/2011 01:00:00 AM MST **By Tom Kensler**
The Denver Post

Posted: 11/22/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — Three years after becoming one of the most highly rated defensive linemen in history to sign with Colorado, junior Nick Kasa said Monday he finally has found a home.

At tight end.

The 6-foot-6 Kasa got in for "five or six" plays in his new position Saturday in the loss to UCLA at the Rose Bowl and said he loved it. Tight end already feels like a great fit, he said.

One of the snaps was a pass play called for Kasa. But quarterback Tyler Hansen was pressured and had to throw the ball away, Kasa said.

"It was fun to get out there and run around," he said.

An All-American at Legacy High School in Broomfield, Kasa arrived at CU in 2009 with much fanfare. Rivals.com had ranked Kasa as the nation's No. 42 best prospect, regardless of position. And Kasa originally extended an oral commitment to Florida, the reigning national champion, before switching to

Colorado.

Kasa never gained any traction in the trenches, however. During his initial August camp, he suffered a knee injury in the first scrimmage that caused him to miss three games. Soon after returning, he contracted mononucleosis and was sidelined for the last five games. Kasa played in all 12 games in 2010, but made only one start and was in on just 18 tackles.

Kasa believes his progress was slowed by being asked to play both defensive end and defensive tackle rather than concentrating on one position. Buried on the depth chart this season, he went to CU coaches at midseason and volunteered to play on offense if it would help get him on the field.

Coach Jon Embree suggested tight end and the move was made Oct. 26. Kasa now wears jersey No. 90.

Ironically, one reason Kasa chose Colorado over Florida during the recruiting process was because he did not want to play on offense. Former Gators coach Urban Meyer

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told Kasa that he might project as an offensive tackle.

"Now, I don't care if it's offense or defense, I just want to play," Kasa said Monday. "I'm 260 pounds now (down from his listed preseason weight of 270), so that's perfect for tight end."

Kasa said he hadn't played tight end since middle school. So, what about his hands?

"I can catch doing one-on-one stuff," he said. "But it's the team stuff (running pass routes) and reading defenses that I haven't done much."

Although Kasa may get some snaps Friday in the 1:30 p.m. season finale at Utah, Embree said spring drills "will be huge" for Kasa to show he can compete for a starting job next fall. Embree said Kasa will remain a tight end.

Two remaining suspended players are done. Embree said Monday that two suspended sophomores, cornerback Deji Olatoye and linebacker Liloa Nobriga, will not be invited back to the team.

Olatoye and Nobriga were among five players suspended on Oct. 5 by Embree for violating unspecified team rules. Josh Moten, Parker Orms and Paul Vigo have been reinstated.

Footnotes. Apparently Embree plans to remain at his alma mater for a while, perhaps for a long while. Public records of recent Boulder County real estate transactions show that Embree purchased property on 95th Street for \$1.44 million. . . . Senior defensive back Travis Sandersfeld and junior defensive lineman Will Pericak were named to

the 25-man Pac-12 all-academic team.

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