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CU Buffs' Brian Lockridge really shines off the field

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

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Brian Lockridge is a reserve player at Colorado who is a true All-American to the many people he helps. (AAron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — As Colorado's 2011 football season winds down the drain, who would think that its most valuable player has accomplished more than Andrew Luck?

No, senior backup cornerback Brian Lockridge may not have thrilled as many college football fans as Stanford's likely Heisman Trophy winner. Yet don't tell that to the heartbroken families visiting Boulder Community Hospital, for whom Lockridge plays the piano on his own time. Ask the old men at the Boulder Homeless Shelter where Lockridge gives them an ear they've never

had, not to mention a bowl of soup he helped make.

No player can hold Lockridge's chin strap with the kids at Casa de la Esperanza, a community helping seasonal farm workers whose children he reads

to — in Spanish. Then there are the children of divorced parents he counsels, using his own life as a measuring stick.

Now volunteering as a referee at fraternity intramural games? Lockridge might have some competition there.

To all of those folks, Lockridge is an All-American. They couldn't care less he has scored only three career touchdowns when he was a tailback. To his CU teammates, who struggle to balance football and school, his off-field philanthropy amazes them more than anything Oregon and Stanford did on the field of play.

To the Allstate AFCA Good Works Team who honored him, he's one of the top 22 players in college football who make a difference in their community.

His philosophy should be emblazoned in gold somewhere on the award for every football

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player to read: "Honestly, it's not what you have," he says. "It's what you're able to give."

The piano man

Lockridge can't read music but has been playing the piano since he was 8. Friends say Brian could pick up an Aborigine's didjeridu and play decently in minutes.

"He's incredible," said Colorado tight end Matt Bahr, Lockridge's closest friend from Mission Viejo (Calif.) High. "I've seen him bring multiple people to tears with his ability on the piano."

At Casa de la Esperanza, about 40 families send children to the community center for everything from reading to science projects.

"He was remarkable," said Carlota Loya Hernandez, the program coordinator. "He was very, very kind, very, very consistent, very responsible. It's nice to have a volunteer who's committed."

Matt Stinchcomb has been voting on the AFCA Good Team for five years. The former NFL lineman said he and 10 others comb through profiles in a binder 2 to 3 inches thick to select candidates. If Lockridge doesn't jump off sports pages, he jumped off these.

"What made his story — and I don't want to discount the other stories — but it was his initiative," Stinchcomb said. "The idea that he clearly had the gift, musically, and he found a way to use that gift in just an incredibly positive way."

Funny, Lockridge had heard of the Heisman Trophy but never the AFCA Good Team award when he started all his volunteer work. Then again, he started helping others at a young age.

"It's something I love doing," he says, "and I'm getting an award for something I love doing."

Challenging childhood

The impact he could have on people occurred well before he put on shoulder pads. When he was 8, his father, a building inspector, took him to a poppy seed festival in Lancaster, Calif., where they volunteered at the front gate. Brian found he liked

meeting strangers. He liked how his smile brightened their day.

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Brian Lockridge can't read music, but he plays the piano well enough that no listener would have guessed it. He plays at Boulder Community Hospital. (Special to The Denver Post, Allstate)

However, his life began to tailspin three years later when his parents divorced. His mother, a janitor, kept moving every time the rent went up. Palmdale. Carson. Tracy. Trabuco Canyon. He had attended five middle schools when his mother upped and moved to Reno, Nev.

At 15, after a short stint in Reno, he'd had enough. He moved in with a friend's family, the Bosankos, then moved to Dove Canyon in Orange County with Bahr, whom he had gotten to know from a Bible study.

Bahr's stepfather, Mike Massero, is a commercial real estate developer heavily involved with the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif. He and Bahr took Lockridge to long-stay motels in Santa Ana where they delivered food to alcoholics, junkies and the mentally deranged. They'd go to adoption agencies and play football with the kids.

"It really hit home when I moved out of the house and saw how much effect the community had on my behavior, who I was as a person and it definitely changed my life, from not even thinking about going to college, not having a certain drive as far as a career to a complete 180," Lockridge said. "All of this was based on who I was around."

So he set out being around as many people as he could. Besides orphans and the destitute, he tried counseling his peers, talking to rival players from the inner-city whose goals began and ended with an NFL contract and a shiny car.

"I have a friend and he thinks he can be the best rapper out there," Lockridge says. "For him that's his goal. There's no substance to that. It's great to have that on the side. But I talk about being well-rounded. Don't put all your eggs in one basket."

At CU, like most Division I college programs, most players hold out that dream of the NFL to the bitter end. Though the Buffs (1-7, 0-4 Pac 12) are in the midst of their sixth consecutive losing season, Lockridge puts the percentage of incoming players at CU whose top goal is the NFL at "95-98 percent."

Lockridge, who was converted to cornerback

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earlier this season when coach Jon Embree was short of bodies in the secondary, won't play Saturday at Arizona State. It'll be the fourth consecutive game he's missed with a sprained ankle. But, unlike his teammates, his future is set. He already has his degree in communications — his lone class this semester is sign language — and has a job lined up with Victaulic, a piping systems company in Phoenix. He starts Jan. 9. He'll take part of Boulder with him.

"I say in all my speeches, I was raised by a community," Lockridge says. "And it takes a community to raise a man."

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Volunteer work

CU's Brian Lockridge has spread his goodwill throughout the community. Here is his take on some places where he has volunteered:

Casa de la Esperanza: "Their window of focus was just so narrow about what comes after elementary school and high school. A lot of them ask about football, which is great. From there where do they want to go in life? (I try to) get their minds thinking about what they'd like to do."

Boulder Homeless Shelter: "I go in there just to brighten their day. It's a tough situation. But for me, it's just to be around them and be a friend to talk to. A lot of them had kids and families elsewhere, and they're the only ones in their family that went astray."

Fishy, a ministry for children of divorced parents at Boulder's First Presbyterian Church: "I tell them, 'Only do things that are in your control.' I revert back to football. There's no guarantee for you to be healthy the whole time in your career. . . . It takes awhile to get that across, but know

that, well, if it happens, you can't let it overrun your life."

Boulder Community Hospital: "You have a lot of people who come in, they've heard bad news. They're waiting to hear about a friend or a loved one. (Playing the piano) calms them down. I went down (Tuesday) and a woman was crying. She listened to me for 30 minutes and thanked me. She said I made her day."

John Henderson, The Denver Post

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

OCTOBER 27, 2011, 10:24 AM

Fifteen true freshmen playing this season may be it for CU

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Colorado coach Jon Embree said this week that he does not foresee using any more true freshmen.

CU has already played 15 first-year players. According to the school's sports information department, that number is tied with Tennessee for fifth-most nationally.

"We're about where we are," Embree said. "I'm not going to burn any 'shirts (redshirts) for one game or a few plays.

"If any more freshmen play, they have to play. It has to be a situation with an injury (at that position) or such that they would get a lot of quality reps.

"We'll still play the guys that give us the best chance to win. So we're not going to forsake everybody and just throw in the young guys."

True freshmen who have played:

OG Paulay Asiata, TB Malcolm Creer, LB Brady Daigh, DB-Ret D.D. Goodson, LB Woodson Greer, S Will Harlos, CB Greg Henderson, OL Alex Lewis, WR Tyler McCulloch, P Darragh O'Neill, PK Will Oliver, DE Juda Parker, LB-S K.T. Tu'umalo, WR Austin Vincent, S Kyle Washington.

True freshmen on scholarship who thus far have kept their redshirts: DB Jermaine Clark, QB Stevie Joe Dorman, DB Sherrard Harrington, OL Marc Mustoe, OL Stephane Nembot, WR Nelson Spruce. (Harrington was ruled out for the season with a hip problem; Nembot converted from DE to OT).

"The fan support is there," freshman tailback Malcolm Creer said. "I can tell that everybody believes things will turn around."

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

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QB Nick Hirschman likely to start for CU Buffs this week

Freshman would replace injured starter Tyler Hansen

By Josh Lindenstein and Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writers
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:10/26/2011 09:21:51 PM MDT

Redshirt freshman quarterback Nick Hirschman is likely to make his first college start for Colorado this week at Arizona State, replacing injured starter Tyler Hansen.

Hirschman has taken the majority of the first-team practice repetitions in the first three practices of the week and coach Jon Embree is generally reluctant to play someone who hasn't participate fully in practice by Wednesday.

Hansen, who suffered a concussion that knocked him out of last week's home loss to Oregon, was at Wednesday's practice but was not in pads with his teammates. He has started every game so far this season.

Embree was coy when asked for an update on Hansen's status.

"That I don't know," Embree said. "We'll have to see. You'll have to tune in."

If Hirschman starts Saturday, it will mark the fourth consecutive season and the eighth time in the past nine years the Buffs will have used at least two starting quarterbacks.

The only season during that span in which the starter remained the same throughout the year was the 2007 season when the Buffs finished the regular season 6-6 with Cody Hawkins under center and lost to Alabama in the Independence Bowl.

Hirschman has played in each of the past three games, seeing limited action in road losses at Stanford and Washington and playing more than a half against the Ducks.

Hansen's 2010 season ended prematurely in Week 7 when he suffered a spleen injury against Texas Tech.

Kasa moving?

Junior defensive end Nick Kasa could be considering a move to tight end.

Kasa was wearing a black No. 90 jersey (offense) at Wednesday's practice and stayed after to catch passes from quarterback Connor Wood.

Nothing has been announced by the program.

Kasa, a 6-foot-6, 270-pound product of Legacy High School in Broomfield, chose CU over Florida three years ago in recruiting, in part, because Florida coach Urban Meyer wanted to move him to tight end or offensive line.

Kasa has played in all eight games for the CU defense, but he has made just seven total tackles in 132 snaps and hasn't recorded a sack.

Defense needs help

The Colorado defense is among the worst in the nation in several areas, including points allowed and passing defense. The Buffs are allowing 37 points a game and rank 114th in pass efficiency defense.

Injuries and suspensions have contributed to the team's inability to stop opponents, but Embree also blamed the offense this week.

"We are not doing a good enough job offensively limiting the exposure of our defense," Embree said. "I never realized how hard it is to play defense until I had to coach it for four years and it is amazing how much running and how the intensity level is totally different on that side of the ball, and you can only do it so many times a game effectively.

"The more you are exposed, the less effective you are on that side. That is where the offense comes in and that is where we have to be better offensively in helping our defense."

The CU offense ranks 113th in rushing, 102nd in total offense and 107th in scoring.

Big boost

The CU secondary will get a big boost this week with the return of free safety Ray Polk, who missed last week with a concussion, and senior cornerback Travis Sandersfeld, who has missed the six games after sustaining a lower leg injury against Cal in Week 2.

Sandersfeld was named a starter at cornerback in fall camp and played well in the first two games against Hawaii and Cal.

Polk is one of a handful of Buffs who will be returning home on the trip to Arizona. Polk was recruited to CU from Brophy Prep in Scottsdale, Ariz.

"Polk's going home," Embree said. "I knew he wasn't going to miss this game."

Notable

Defensive back D.D. Goodson practiced Wednesday and will likely be available against ASU after suffering a concussion against Oregon. ...

The Buffs practiced in the bubble for the first time this season after snow fell Tuesday night and into Wednesday. "It went all right," Embree said. "We're practicing differently anyway, so it works out good from a space standpoint because we're going more good on good and doing individual work and stuff. It went good."

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RINGO: Desire to hit defines ASU linebacker Vontaze Burfict

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:10/26/2011 11:57:02 PM MDT

Five opponents remain on the schedule for Colorado coach Jon Embree, but to this point in the season the first-year coach hasn't seen a defender in the Pac-12 Conference as dominating as what he has seen on film while preparing to face Arizona State and linebacker Vontaze Burfict this week.

Apparently, Embree doesn't put much emphasis on statistics.

Burfict enters this week's game tied for 38th in the conference in total tackles, 11th in tackles for loss and fourth in sacks. That hardly sounds like the resume of a defensive player of the year candidate.

However, Embree said Burfict has an effect on his teammates and opponents that doesn't necessarily show up in box scores and it makes him, perhaps, the best defender in the league.

"He is the straw that stirs the drink with them," Embree said. "He brings all the emotional energy. If it moves, he's going to hit it, and that will be conveyed to our team. So don't be out there jogging around relaxing or thinking the play is over. He plays to the echo of the whistle. I love his passion. I love his intensity level. You could tell it's important to him. I think he's a heck of a player."

USC quarterback Matt Barkley, who has played against Burfict since they were both in high school in Southern California, called the ASU linebacker a dirty player before their matchup earlier this season. Burfict got the last laugh with a victory over Barkley and the Trojans -- and an interception, too.

Barkley received a public reprimand from the conference the following week for his comments about Burfict, who is considered one of the best linebackers in the nation in his junior season.

Burfict was second in tackles at ASU as a freshman in 2009 and led the team in tackles last season.

He also developed the reputation cited by Barkley by accumulating personal foul penalties and even headbutting Oregon State quarterback Ryan Katz last season. ASU coach Dennis Erickson suspended Burfict one game for that incident.

CU defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe grew up in the same area as Burfict and played against him in high school.

Uzo-Diribe said it was obvious then that Burfict had special ability.

Asked what kind of reputation Burfict has, Uzo-Diribe said: "He's got a good one where I'm from."

Embree said he doesn't believe Burfict is a dirty player or deserves to be thought of as one. He compared Burfict's style of play and intensity to Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, whom many consider the best linebacker in the NFL over the past decade.

"I don't think the reputation of some of the things that has happened to Vontaze is why he can intimidate people," Embree said. "When you hit someone hard in the mouth, that will intimidate you, and that is what he does."

"The other things that have happened with him, there is way more good than that and I don't see him as a player that is defined by some of the other things. I see him as a player defined as how he gets after you."

Colorado offensive players will take the field Saturday in Tempe with No. 7 on their minds. The game will be televised by Root Sports (4:30 p.m. kickoff).

"The guy is an outstanding linebacker," said CU quarterback Nick Hirschman, who could be making his first college start against the Sun Devils. "He plays with a lot of passion. He plays the game real fast and he hits like a hammer. There is a

lot of good stuff from him."

Foles gold

Arizona quarterback Nick Foles is the second Pac-12 quarterback this season to be given the keys to the car so to speak.

Foles scripted 13 of Arizona's first 18 plays last week in a blowout victory over UCLA. Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck also has been allowed to call his own plays at times this fall.

Foles probably earned himself more opportunities to call the shots by leading the Wildcats to two touchdowns and more than 150 yards of total offense while calling the plays.

"I know what the team likes, I know what I like and, studying the defense, I know what's good," he told the Arizona Daily Star. "Any quarterback can tell you: You want to run plays that you enjoy running."

Wonder if Foles would have been entrusted with the responsibility if former coach Mike Stoops was still the head coach. Stoops was fired two weeks ago and interim coach Tim Kish has given offensive coaches free reign.

Longevity long shot

Stanford first-year coach David Shaw said this week he would like to coach at his alma mater at least until his 1½-year-old son graduates from the school.

That would be a great story filled with many successful seasons for the Cardinal because fans, boosters and school administrators are too fickle these days to let any coach hang around that long if they aren't ultra successful. Shaw is off to a good start. He's undefeated in his first seven games.

Inconsistent J-Fly

When Josh Smith transferred from Colorado to UCLA following the 2008 season, you might have thought the end of his days had arrived, listening to CU fans.

Smith was a big playmaker for the Buffs that season finishing with the second-most all-purpose yards in the program's history (1,987), but much of that total came on kickoff and punt returns.

Three years later, Smith still hasn't found a way to be a consistent factor in an offense.

The guess here is he still doesn't spend enough time watching film and studying his playbook, a criticism of him by his former CU coaches.

His name doesn't even register among the top 10 receivers in the conference during his senior season. He is eighth in all-purpose yards and is still a pretty decent kickoff return man.

He will get more opportunities in the UCLA offense this week with four of his fellow receivers suspended for their part in a bench-clearing brawl during the loss to Arizona last week.

Numbers game

10 -- Consecutive games Stanford has won by at least 25 points. The Cardinal are the first team to do so since 1936, according to ESPN. Stanford also has the nation's longest winning streak at 15 games.

Who's hot?

Utah defensive end Derrick Shelby leads his team with five pass breakups. That total is good enough for eighth among all Pac-12 defenders.

Who's not?

The Washington defense is now ranked 105th in the nation in scoring defense, allowing 34 points a game after giving up 65 to Stanford last week.

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Posted on Wed, Oct. 26, 2011

Colorado (1-7) at (23) Arizona State (5-2) (ET)

By Sports Network
The Sports Network

GAME NOTES: The Colorado Buffaloes' first season as a Pac-12 Conference member has been a disappointing one, and they are clearly underdogs in Saturday's clash with 23rd-ranked Arizona State.

Things can't get much worse for Colorado and first-year head coach Jon Embree, as the team owns a 1-7 record and is currently mired in a five-game losing streak. The Buffaloes have been blown out in three consecutive outings by their new league rivals, including last weekend's 45-2 loss to Oregon in front of a deflated home crowd.

"It's up to them - they're the leaders, it's their team - to create a sense of urgency, a purpose, why you need to come out and practice...a purpose about coming in and working hard," said Embree, speaking of a challenge he made to his seniors after last weekend's beating.

As for the Sun Devils, they have had two weeks to prepare for this affair, as they most recent outing resulted in a 41-27 loss to Oregon back on October 15. That defeat halted a three-game win streak for ASU, which can earn bowl eligibility with a win on Saturday. The club is 4-0 at home this season, an obvious reason for confidence heading into action this week.

Arizona State has won both previous meetings with Colorado, including a 33-14 romp over the Buffaloes in 2007.

It wasn't as if Colorado didn't take care of the ball last week against Oregon, as the Buffaloes committed just a single turnover. Unfortunately, they simply could not sustain drives, finishing with a mere 231 yards and failing to post a single touchdown or field goal in the affair. QB Tyler Hansen suffered a concussion in that game and may not be available this weekend. WR Paul Richardson will likely be out as well with a knee injury, and RB Rodney Stewart continues to nurse a bum knee as well, so the offense is clearly depleted.

The Colorado offense offered little resistance against Oregon, which ran for 371 yards on 48 carries and finished with 527 yards of total offense. Not a single takeaway was mustered by the Buffaloes, who yielded five touchdowns to the Ducks' offense.

"It is hard," said a disappointed Embree after the lopsided affair. "I'm smiling because you have to smile to keep from crying."

If Hansen can't go this weekend, Nick Hirschman will start at QB. The young signal caller has attempted just nine passes, so it is hard to predict what he might do under center. Richardson is clearly the top playmaker on the roster, and Stewart is far better than any other back wearing a CU uniform. The Buffs are scoring just 19.4 ppg and generating 324.5 total ypg.

Defensively, Colorado has been weak to say the least, allowing opponents to post 37.1 ppg and 423.6 total ypg. The Buffaloes have permitted 37 TDs to opposing offenses, 20 of which have been passing scores, and they are yielding 12.1 yards per pass completion, as well as 5.1 yards per rushing attempt.

Arizona State certainly has the talent to exploit that defense, especially with Brock Osweiler at quarterback. The big signal caller has completed 66 percent of his passes for 1,968 yards and 15 touchdowns with eight interceptions, helping his team average 34.1 ppg and 426.9 total ypg. Jamal Miles, Gerrell Robinson and Aaron Plugrad all have four receiving TDs, and Robinson has gained 523 yards on his 32 carries. As for the ground attack, Cameron Marshall has run for 518 yards and nine scores, and he figures to be on the field this weekend despite an ankle injury.

Opponents are scoring 22.6 ppg against ASU while gaining 375.7 total ypg, and the Sun Devils have actually been better against the pass than the run. Sure, they have given up more passing yards than rushing yards, but the defense has 11 interceptions to their credit with only eight passing scores permitted. Furthermore, foes are averaging just 10.6 yards per pass completion.

Against Oregon last week, ASU played well offensively, gaining 460 yards, including 291 from the arm of Osweiler. Unfortunately, he was intercepted twice, and the Sun Devil defense had no answer for the Ducks' potent ground attack. Oregon racked up 327 rushing yards on 49 attempts and averaged nearly 14 yards per pass completion.

"The bottom line is with Oregon, you're playing one of the best teams in the country, and if you allow them to run the football you've got problems," Arizona State coach Dennis Erickson said.

The Sun Devils will earn bowl eligibility with a blowout of the Buffaloes, who simply aren't talented enough to hang with the home team. Expect this one to be well in hand by intermission.

Sports Network Predicted Outcome: Arizona State 41, Colorado 17

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Colorado, Utah Struggling in New League

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Bufs, Utes a combined 0–8 in Pac-12 action

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<p> Bufs, Utes a combined 0–8 in Pac-12 action</p>

By Mitch Light

Utah and Colorado are two proud programs that were both welcomed with open arms to the new-look Pac-12. With two BCS Bowl appearances in the past seven years, Utah was regarded as one of the elite non-AQ conference teams in the nation. And while Colorado has fallen on hard times in recent years, the Buffaloes won four Big 12 North Division titles from 2001 through 2005 and won a national title as recently as 1990. Clearly, this is a program that has proven it can win at a high level.

The transition to a new league, however, has not been kind for Colorado or Utah, which are a combined 0–8 in the Pac-12. Utah has some solid wins in non-conference action, most notably a 54–10 victory at rival BYU and a 26–14 win at Pittsburgh, but the Utes have been alarmingly uncompetitive against Pac-12 teams. They are getting



27 loss.

outscored by 17.8 points and outgained by 117.7 yards per game. It's been worse for Colorado, which is really struggling under first-year coach Jon Embree. The Buffs have lost their four league games by an average of 29.0 points have been outgained by a staggering 244.3 yards per game.

"It is hard," said Embree, a 1986 CU alum, after the Buffs' 45–2 loss vs. Oregon last week. "I'm smiling because you have to smile to keep from crying. It is hard because I feel that we have missed opportunities."

Colorado missed a huge opportunity back in early October in its first Pac-12 game. The Buffs led Washington State in Boulder, 27–17, late in the fourth quarter but gave up two touchdowns in the final 2:35 of the game en route to a 31–

CU plays the top two teams in the North Division, Arizona State and USC, the next two weeks, but the schedule softens a bit down the stretch, with Arizona, UCLA and Utah over the final three weeks.

Utah, despite its struggles, is still in position to reach a bowl game for the ninth straight season. The Utes, at 3–4 overall, will need to go 3–2 against the following slate: Oregon State, Arizona, UCLA, Washington State and Colorado, and three of the games (OSU, UCLA, CU) are in Salt Lake City. The key will be the play of quarterback Jon Hays, who was inserted into the starting lineup three weeks ago after Jordan Wynn went down with an injury. Hays played well in the win over Utah, but has a 1-to-6 TD-to-INT ratio in his other two starts, losses to Arizona State and California. If Hays can limit his mistakes, which he should against weaker competition, the Utes should be able to win at least three of their remaining five games and end their first season in their new league with yet another trip to a bowl game.

AROUND THE PAC-12

- True freshman Malcolm Agnew has only played in three games this season but still leads Oregon State in rushing by more than 200 yards. Agnew has rushed for 375 yards on 66 attempts for a healthy 5.7-yard average.
- Prior to last week, Arizona had given up at least 37 points in every game vs. a FBS opponent. The Cats, however, held UCLA to 12 in their 36-point win over the Bruins in the first game under interim coach Tim Kish.
- Only one of Stanford's seven wins have come against a team with a winning record. The Cardinal, however, did beat that one team (Washington) by 44 points.
- Colorado has punted 52 times. Stanford has punted 16 times.
- Stanford is 9-of-9 on fourth down this season.
- Washington State and Oregon share the Pac-12 lead with five plays from scrimmage of at least 60 yards. Oregon is one of only four teams nationally that has two plays of at least 80 yards.
- Arizona's Nick Foles leads the Pac-12 and ranks third nationally with 45.7 pass attempts per game.
- Andrew Luck has completed 80 percent of his passes on first down this season.

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The EDGE: Sun Devils should cruise

Posted By [Greg Dillard](#) On October 26, 2011 @ 9:58 pm In [Football,Sports](#) | [No Comments](#)



[1]

HOLDING THE CARDS: ASU junior linebacker Vontaze Burfict points to the Sun Devil sideline after a sack against Mizzou earlier in the season. ASU appears to hold a solid advantage over visiting Colorado. (Photo by Beth Easterbrook)

Quarterback

EDGE: ASU

Junior quarterback Brock Osweiler brought swagger and confidence into his first full season under center for the ASU football team. That leadership has delivered five wins, including statement victories over Missouri and Southern California.

Through the Sun Devils' first seven games, Osweiler has completed 171 of 259 passes for 1968 yards. He's also tossed 15 touchdowns and averages 281.1 yards per game.

Osweiler has been intercepted eight times but sports a 142.8 efficiency rating through seven games.

His poise and ability to lead not only the offense, but also the entire Sun Devil team has proven to be invaluable.

Colorado lost senior quarterback Tyler Hansen midway through last week's debacle against powerful Oregon. Hansen had thrown for 62 yards on seven completions versus the Ducks.

Hansen has collected 1,744 passing yards this season to go with 13 touchdowns.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Nick Hirschman took over under center and completed eight of pass attempts for 71 yards. However, it's likely that Hansen is back in the starting lineup come Saturday.

Running back

EDGE: ASU

Junior running back Cameron Marshall bolted for 101 yards and a touchdown on 20 carries two weeks ago.

The highly skilled Marshall remains as ASU's leading rusher with 518 yards and nine touchdowns on the season. He averages over four yards per carry and 74 yards per game.

Junior wide receiver Jamal Miles has shown that he can do it all on the football field. That includes serving as a threat on the ground as noted by his 169 yards and average of 8.4 yards per carry.

The CU rushing attack is led by senior tailback Rodney Stewart and his 473 yards. He came into the season fifth on the program's all-time rushing list with 2,744 career yards.

The Buff's running game has been decent at best in 2011 with the team averaging 90.9 yards per game, which places them last in the Pac-12.

Wide Receivers / Tight ends

EDGE: ASU

After a forgettable start to his final campaign in Tempe, senior wide receiver Gerell Robinson has strung together several notable performances in recent weeks.

The Chandler Hamilton product was highly touted for his talents prior to joining ASU, thus Osweiler and the Sun Devils have taken full advantage of Robinson's abilities as of late.

He hauled in six catches for 120 yards and a touchdown in Eugene. One week earlier, Robinson collected seven catches for 101 yards against Utah. He now owns a team leading 523 receiving yards on the year with four touchdowns.

Miles and senior wide receiver Aaron Pflugrad have also caught four touchdown passes. Pflugrad has come into his own this season with 389 yards on 28 catches.

Senior wide receiver Mike Willie posted a solid game against the Utes with his 98 receiving yards, seven catches, and two scores.

The Buffs' receiving core was all but completely shut down by the UO defense last Saturday. Colorado earned just 133 yards in the air, and the longest completion of the game came on a 28-yard pass.

In comparison, ASU's Robinson earned just 13 yards less by himself versus the UO defense than the entire Buffs team did combined.

Offensive Line

EDGE: ASU

A crucial, yet sometimes overlooked, key to a high-powered collegiate offense is a capable offensive line. ASU certainly possess one with its experienced offensive front led by senior center Garth Gerhart.

The unit has suffered its fair share of injuries over the span of the season. UO did manage to sack Osweiler on four occasions.

Sophomore tackle Evan Finkenberg's status remains in question heading into Saturday's game.

CU's offense ranks dead last in the conference in scoring offense and some of those struggles could be attributed to the offensive line. Hansen has been sacked a whopping 21 times this season.

Defensive Line

EDGE: ASU

Senior defensive lineman Jamaar Jarrett is tied for 14th in the Pac-12 in tackles for loss with seven. He's now produced 20 tackles for loss in his career along with 7.5 career sacks. Jarrett has also forced a pair of fumbles on the season.

Senior defensive lineman Bo Moos has recorded two fumble recoveries in 2011, which ties him for second in the conference.

Jarrett and the rest of the defensive line will be tasked with pressuring Hansen and stopping Stewart on Saturday.

Junior defensive tackle Will Pericak and senior defensive tackle Conrad Obi anchor the Buffaloes' defensive line. Pericak tallied 30 solo tackles and two sacks a season ago.

Linebackers

EDGE: ASU

ASU coach Dennis Erickson has heaped praise on senior linebacker Colin Parker all season long and deservedly so. Parker, who is one of the team's three captains, serves as an integral leader on defense.

Parker recovered his first career fumble in the UO game and leads ASU with 45 tackles.

Neither junior linebacker Vontaze Burfict nor senior linebacker Shelly Lyons can be overlooked, as both are capable of making game changing plays.

After a rather slow start, Erickson is confident that Burfict will continue to play well during the season's final five games. Burfict currently sits fourth in the Pac-12 with four solo sacks.

For Colorado, junior linebacker Jon Major has enjoyed a fine season after making the transition from the inside to the outside this offseason. He's grabbed a pair of sacks in eight games.

Secondary

EDGE: ASU

The Sun Devils' secondary appeared to be severely battered and bruised throughout the early weeks of the season. Injuries claimed senior cornerback Omar Bolden and redshirt freshman cornerback Devan Spann.

The position's depth was challenged, yet several players have emerged into contributors.

Sophomore safety Alden Darby has reeled in three interceptions, two of which came against Oregon State. Senior safety Eddie Elder has put in extra post practice work in hopes of making more interceptions. He's notched 106 career tackles including 5 1/2 for loss.

Despite the injuries, ASU's secondary has played well overall.

The Buffaloes are near the bottom of the conference in regards to pass defense efficiency and interceptions, ranking dead last in both categories.

CU has made just three interceptions for 52 yards on the year, and is next to last in the Pac-12 in pass defense efficiency by having allowed 1925 yards and 20 touchdowns.

Special Teams

EDGE: ASU

Special teams can often dictate the outcome of a game, and that's when an explosive return man such as Miles becomes even more valuable for the Sun Devils.

Miles completed a 78-yard punt return for a touchdown earlier this season. He also returned a kickoff to the end zone in the season opener.

Redshirt freshman kicker Alex Garoutte made both of his field goal attempts at UO. He nailed a 37-yarder in the second quarter before splitting the uprights on a 30-yard kick in the fourth. Garoutte is now 7 for 10 on field goals this season and 28 of 29 on PAT's.

CU averages just 17.5 yards per kickoff return compared to ASU's 23.3 yards per return average.

For Colorado, freshman kicker Will Oliver is 9 of 12 in field goals this season including his longest of 52 yards.

Overall

EDGE: ASU

ASU suffered just its second loss of the season, a mistake-ridden 41-27 defeat, in Eugene two weeks ago. After a much needed bye week, the Sun Devils appear heavily favored in Saturday's bout against Pac-12 newcomer CU. The Buffs are mired in a miserable season and a five game-losing streak. Their inexperienced and injury-riddled team has been routinely dominated throughout conference play. ASU's high-powered, multi-threat offense and experienced defense should lead the Sun Devils to a win in this week's Homecoming matchup.

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