

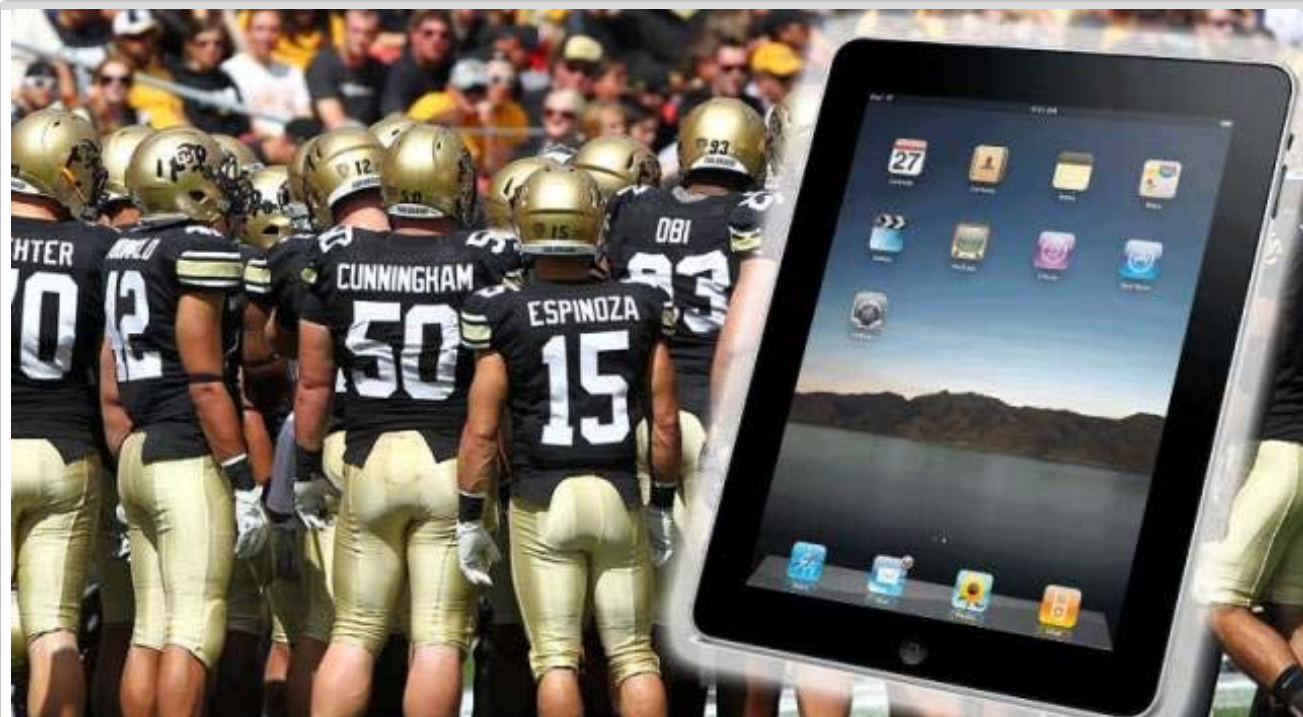


Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Buffs Planning To Make Good Use Of iPads

Release: 09/27/2011 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - This used to be a phrase that no football player wanted to hear: "Coach wants to see you . . . and bring your playbook."

Here's what that phrase will soon become: "Coach wants to see you . . . and bring your iPad."

Things - very fundamental things - are changing in college athletics, and maybe by next summer when football players report at the University of Colorado, many of those telephone book-sized playbooks will have been junked in favor of lightweight, svelte iPads.

The movement already has started, the technology already is in place.

In a pilot program that makes CU unique among U.S. universities, 80 Apple iPad2s were acquired for use in the athletic department. Of that total, 44 were ticketed for football,

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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Colorado Football Notes

and a dozen each for men's and women's basketball and volleyball. They are issued to student-athletes on a check-out, check-in process similar to the department's laptop program.

Depending on the success of the program, said Jamie Guy, CU's director of sports video, more of the iPads could become available for Buffs student-athletes. Guy recently began distributing the iPads to football coaches and players, offering tutorial help if needed.

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"The thing about these kids, they're very up-to-date on technology and can really figure out uses that we've never considered," he said. "They'll make it a very positive experience."

And the potential is there for it to be beneficial on a number of levels in athletics and academics.

Guy, in his eighth year as director of sports video and his 11th on the CU staff, was the point-man in August 2010 for the Buffs' venture into the Hudl system. That innovative technology enhanced communication among players, coaches and between teammates, and allowed an almost instantaneous review of game footage for players and coaches returning from road trips in any sport. Video clips, complete with notes and "telestrations," could be passed back and forth between coaches and players, or between players and players.

But there was one key requirement to make Hudl work: An Internet connection.

Say hello to the iPad2 . . . say goodbye to the Internet requirement. And iPad2 users will benefit from the best of that world as well as Hudl; that "app" is available for downloading.

"The mobility and accessibility (offered by the iPad2) are unmatched," Guy said. "Players being able to study practice and game film on planes, hotels with or without the Internet . . . they've never have been able to do it in any sport. There also will be the ability to do digital versions of playbooks, saving cost of printing scouting reports each week and all things that go with that."

Senior safety Anthony Perkins was offered a sneak preview of the iPad2's benefits after the Buffs' season-opener in Hawai'i. Last winter, after hearing rumors that iPads might be in the works for the football program, "Perk" approached Guy and was shown the new Hudl "app" for the iPad.

Perkins' reaction: "I need that . . . I decided I couldn't wait. I had to get one (iPad) right now."

He did, becoming one of two forerunners - senior quarterback Tyler Hansen is the other - for the iPad2s introduction to the football team. Because both already had purchased their own instruments, the pair slotted for them went to teammates.

After spending the next several months familiarizing himself with the iPad, Perkins "bugged (Guy) on the way back from Hawai'i and made him put the game on my Ipad . . . I was able to watch it on the plane ride home. It was a good deal" - although the Buffs lost 34-17.

Perkins called the technology's potential "awesome . . . I'd been advocating to everybody that it's something that would really be beneficial for us, and I was hoping it would happen soon. It's exciting that it really did happen.

"The big benefit is convenience. You can watch film almost anywhere on campus, anywhere in the building. It's all personalized, too. You can watch whatever you want, whenever you want to watch it. It's a lot more functional on the iPad than it is on a computer."

In addition to myriad uses in athletics, Guy noted the iPad2 can be used for academic work and communication with professors. It is lighter than many text books, has a calendar function for scheduling purposes and features

a battery life of eight or nine hours.

"It's a phenomenal product," Guy said, noting the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers have made the move to the iPad2/Hudl and that he expects to benefit because CU offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy is friends with Bucs coach Raheem Morris.

"He and 'EB' are really close and (Bieniemy) will get me in contact with him," Guy said. "We'll do some of the things they're doing with playbooks and film study as well.

"Since this is the first time any school has done anything with it - to my knowledge - there's a lot of new things to discover and figure out. There are so many different ways that it can be advantageous, not just in football but in the academic world as well."

Guy believes that "eventually these will replace the paper playbooks . . . you're not going to have a six-inch thick playbook anymore, but a one-inch thick iPad that can hold millions of those books."

He is still wading through all the possibilities presented by the iPad2s, but he's convinced if a device that eventually contains a playbook is lost, misplaced or stolen, he'll be able to remotely wipe out any information that might compromise any of CU's strategy.

"I'm still figuring out how to do that," he said, "but we'll get to that point."

Most coaches will need (and require) that reassurance.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

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cu briefs

Colorado enlisting help on special teams

Posted: 09/28/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — Colorado has put out an all-points bulletin this week for special-teams players, other than kickers. Only those with experience and savvy need apply.

Actually, this isn't voluntary. Look for the Colorado coaches to strongly encourage veteran players to sign up for the kickoff and punt coverage teams, as well as the return units, for Saturday's home game against Washington State.

After watching numerous special-teams breakdowns last weekend in a 37-17 loss at Ohio State, CU coach Jon Embree said he is tired of sitting some of his best athletes during special-team plays to avoid injuries.

"Because of our lack of depth, we've been protecting guys," Embree said Tuesday at his weekly media luncheon. "We put other (less talented) guys on special teams against Ohio State, and it bit us. It didn't just bite us. It took a huge chunk out of us.

"I'm mad at myself about that. It's not the kids' fault. As a coach, you have to be careful about asking kids to do something they can't do."

Embree said he will "roll the dice" and use fewer players in games. "If it's 40 guys, it's 40 guys," he said.

Good idea, safety said Ray Polk, who is a new addition to the kickoff coverage team.

"It shows a sense of urgency," Polk said, in reference to Colorado's 1-3 start.

Assist from Ohio State.

Embree donned his psychologist hat Monday during a team meeting and told his players that others think more highly of their abilities than they do. That includes Ohio State interim coach Luke Fickell. Embree called Fickell on Sunday evening and asked him to evaluate Colorado's talent. The conversation lasted 20 to 30 minutes, according Embree.

"Hearing Coach Fickell's perspective about our players . . . I shared that with them," Embree told reporters Tuesday. "Some of them were probably shocked about how highly he thought of our guys. They need to understand that they are good, they are capable."

Senior tight end Matt Bahr said: "I've never experienced anything like that. But (an opposing coach) has probably scouted us more than we have."

Apparently, the critique wasn't sugarcoated by Fickell. "The comment on me," Bahr said, "was that I'm not a great route runner, and I don't need to be covered very well because I'll probably drop the ball. That's something I have

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to work on. It's going to inspire me to catch more passes."

Moten to get long look.

An already-thin cornerback corps will be without senior Travis Sandersfeld (leg) again this week and may also be missing sophomore Parker Orms, who injured a leg during the first 10 plays of the Ohio State game.

Embree said Josh Moten, a 6-foot, 195-pound redshirt freshman, will be given every opportunity this week to earn a spot in the rotation.

"So we'll see where he ends up," Embree said of Moten, an option quarterback during his high school days in suburban Los Angeles. "Josh is a competitive guy. The issue has just been (a lack of) consistency. He has the physical skills, size, speed. It's knowing how to do it."

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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sports

Washington State stakes its reputation on its quarterbacks

Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/28/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Ever since Jack Thompson set an NCAA record with 7,818 career yards in the mid-1970s, Washington State has been a quarterback factory.

The roll call includes Timm Rosenbach, Mark Rypien and Drew Bledsoe, as well as Ryan Leaf, who was an NFL bust but a collegiate star, taking the Cougars to the Rose Bowl.

"They always have a (good) quarterback, they always have receivers. That will never change," said Colorado coach Jon Embree, whose Buffaloes will face the Cougars in a Pac-12 opener Saturday.

This season, Washington State (2-1) has been forced to go to its bench. Starting quarterback Jeff Tuel broke his clavicle after just one series in the opener against Idaho State. Enter fifth-year senior and former part-time starter Marshall Lobbestael, who has thrown for 959 yards and 10 touchdowns in three games and is expected to start Saturday at CU.

Tuel is scheduled to throw with pads on next week for the first time since his injury. When Tuel is fully healed, Washington State coach Paul Wulff said Lobbestael probably goes back to the

bench.

"We haven't gotten to that," Wulff said on the Pac-12 teleconference Tuesday. "We'll see how Marshall continues to play. At this point, I'd say if Jeff is healthy, he'll be our starting quarterback."

Lucky for Wulff, Lobbestael stayed vested in football, though it was far from certain he would play in this, his last season.

"He's been part of this rebuilding project, and he's been a mainstay in bringing the Cougars back to a high level of performance," Wulff said. "He's grown extremely attached to the program. It says a lot about his character and his selflessness attitude. It speaks volumes for him as a person."

Washington State doesn't lack for numbers with a backup who has thrown to 11 receivers. The Cougars are fourth nationally in passing offense (380 yards per game), sixth in total offense (539.6) and fifth in scoring (49.0).

Those numbers were largely built against horrid defenses, however. Washington State crushed Big Sky (FCS) member Idaho State 64-21 and chronically rebuilding UNLV 59-7. The first official Pac-12 foe coming to Folsom Field was crushed by San Diego State 42-24 before a bye

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week. Against the Aztecs, Lobbestael threw two interceptions and was sacked six times.

CU and Washington State are the last teams to begin Pac-12 play this season. They have something else in common, with alumni at the helm. Wulff wants to return Washington State to its quarterback domination, much as Embree wants to revisit Colorado's glory days with a powerful running game.

"Offensively, we want to be wide open," Wulff said. "It fits what Washington State has had a great tradition of."

Wulff, like Embree, was a four-year starter at his alma mater. Now in his fourth year on a perpetual hot seat at one of the toughest BCS programs to win at, Wulff said, "Oh, yeah," when asked if he can relate to Embree's challenges.

"He's got some pieces in the cupboard to work with, and there's some talent there," Wulff said. "I'm sure it's not where he would like, and that's the process of rebuilding. I understand what it's like when there's a change in coaching staffs. It's never smooth, for sure."

Don't feel too sorry for CU's thin, banged-up secondary. The Buffs lead Pac-12 schools in pass defense (183.5 yards) and sacks (14).

"They are very good at rushing the quarterback," Wulff said.

Natalie Meisler: 303-954-1295 or nmeisler@denverpost.com

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college football

CU coach Embree and Ohio State coach Fickell talk Buffs' talent

By **Tom Kensler**
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/27/2011 02:05:55 PM MDT

Updated: 09/27/2011 04:33:21 PM MDT

BOULDER — It's not unusual for Colorado coach Jon Embree to talk with the entire squad on Mondays, but this week's team meeting raised eyebrows, according to players.

Embree gave a critical analysis of the Buffaloes — compliments of Ohio State head coach Luke Fickell.

"I'd never experienced anything like that," CU senior tight end Matt Bahr recalled Tuesday.

Speaking Tuesday during his weekly media luncheon, Embree said he chatted briefly on Saturday with Fickell during the post-game handshake following the 37-17 Ohio State win in Columbus.

They agreed to talk again by phone on Sunday evening. That conversation lasted about 20 to 30 minutes, Embree said.

Embree sought out Fickell to get

an outside opinion about his players. For the most part, according to Embree, the Buckeyes coach thought Colorado (1-3) has enough talent to play better than it has shown.

"I talked to Coach Fickell and we talked about (Colorado's) personnel," Embree recalled. "Hearing his perspective about our players... I shared that with them.

"Some of them were probably shocked about how highly he thought of our guys. They need to understand that they are good, they are capable."

CU will host its first Pac-12 Conference game Saturday (1:30 p.m., Fox College Sports) with Washington State (2-1) coming to Boulder. The Buffs' matchup against California two weeks ago was previously scheduled as a nonconference game and did not count in the league standings.

With the season almost one-third completed, Embree already is putting on his psychologist hat.

"I told the players that they need to start seeing themselves for what they're capable of," Embree said. "We have some good players. Do we have a bunch? No. Do we have a lot of depth? No. But we have some good players.

"Those good players have to see it that way and take it upon themselves... When you don't have a bunch of good players, those guys can't

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have an off game. They have to put pressure on themselves to go out and perform at that level or better every week.

All Things Buffs blog



The Denver Post's college reporters give news, notes and analysis on this blog devoted to CU sports.

"This is just my opinion, (but) I don't think the players see themselves that way... The team truly has to have the same expectations that I have."

Bahr said he is sure some of the players took the critiques personally — especially with them coming from an opposing coach.

"I mean, the comment on me was that I'm not a great route runner and I don't need to be covered very well because I'll probably drop the ball," Bahr said. "That's something I have to work on. It's going to inspire me to catch more passes."

Bahr said Embree emphasized that Saturday's Pac-12 opener against Washington State "is really the beginning of our season.

"Guys are on board with that," Bahr said. "We believe there is a lot to still be accomplished."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
tkensler@denverpost.com



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Jon Embree plays psychologist with CU Buffs after Ohio State loss

Colorado coach says players need to believe they are "worthy" and "better than this"

By Kyle Ringo, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/27/2011 04:05:15 PM MDT



To some it might have seemed like a simple tactic to try to invigorate his players. To others it might appear like Colorado coach Jon Embree is already in desperation mode.

With his team at 1-3 coming off an ugly performance on the road at Ohio State, Embree convened a team meeting Monday and began to share with players the critiques of them he received during a Sunday conversation with Ohio State coach Luke Fickell.

Ohio State beat the Buffs 37-17 in Columbus, Ohio, last week. IT was an ugly performance by the Buffs particularly on special teams and led Embree to decided he will have to stick with only the players he trusts on game days.

Embree was attempting to build some confidence in players he said are lacking in that department. He said he wanted them to see that other coaches with no attachment to the program see them as threats on Saturday afternoons.

"I had a discussion with them about they need to start seeing themselves for what they're capable of," Embree said. "They need to start seeing themselves how we're telling them what they're talent level is and what they're capable of as coaches.

"I'm an honest guy and I'm not going to BS the guys and tell them you're this when they're not. We have some good players. We do. Do we have a bunch of them? No. Do we have a lot of depth? No. But we have some good players. And those good players have to see themselves that way and take it upon themselves that when you don't have a bunch of good players, they can't have an off game. They have to have that pressure on themselves that they go out and perform at that level every week."

Embree said coaching, particularly at the college level, often involves such psychological experiments. He said he has felt like Frasier Crane, the TV psychiatrist on the show Cheers and a later spin off, in the past when trying to make players he has coached believe in themselves. He said he had to do it at UCLA with former Bruin and current pro Marcedes Lewis and he also played psychiatrist with Kansas City Chiefs tight end Tony Gonzalez at times.

Embree made some alarming statements during his weekly media luncheon Tuesday answering questions with a rare honesty not often seen from coaches in major college and pro sports.

He acknowledged that he detects a difference in his team when it goes on the road versus when it plays at home, which has obviously contributed to a 19-game road losing streak. Perhaps most eye-opening, Embree said there are too many players on the team who are too willing to accept being backups.

So he tried to infuse them with a little confidence straight from the coach who just beat them badly last week.

"I think some of them were probably shocked at the opinion and how highly he thought of our guys," Embree said. "They need to understand that they are good, they are capable. It's kind of the old, you've been beaten down so much I don't know if it's an expectation I don't know if it's a truly seeing yourself when someone is telling you you are good, you are worthy, you are better than this. I don't know if past experience is something that has helped keep it down. I don't know what it is."

Embree said he expected to be better than 1-3 entering the first Pac-12 Conference game in school history this weekend at home against Washington State. He said he expected to have shed the road losing streak by now. He said he thought his team would be better at running the football by now. Other than that, he said there haven't been any major surprises from his players in the first month of the season.

He said he is disappointed that he isn't seeing more of a sense of urgency. Embree said it's up to the players to decide which direction their season goes from here.

"I completely agree with it," safety Ray Polk said. "Honestly, a lot of people trust in everything that is going on here, but every program, I think, has a few guys that don't either trust themselves or what's going on and don't understand the full work and effort that goes in every game week. So I can definitely agree with that and that's something that people have to find out as they go through their career as a college player."

Senior tight end Matt Bahr, a converted offensive lineman, said many of his teammates have experienced a feeling of shock coming from very successful winning teams in high school to trying to help build a winner at CU. It has been a difficult adjustment and a learning process for those players.

Bahr said he appreciated the attempt by Embree to connect with players and get them to believe in themselves. Bahr admitted the scouting report Ohio State coaches provided to Embree on him was not positive, but it allowed him to see how another coaching staff outside of Boulder views him.

"Honesty is awesome in my opinion," Bahr said. "When a coach is straightforward with you and tells you how it is, I'd rather have that than have it be a mystery. ...I think guys took it personally and it will help make our team better."

Pac-12 season offers chance at fresh start for CU Buffs

Embree believes Buffs must win at home against WSU

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/27/2011 05:50:50 PM MDT



The Buffs can still smell the roses.

At least for another week or two.

After producing a disheartening 1-3 non-conference record, Colorado has turned the focus to its first Pac-12 schedule, which begins Saturday with Washington State's visit to Folsom Field.

The Cougars (2-1) believe they have turned the corner in Paul Wulff's fourth season as head coach after winning a total of five games in the previous three seasons.

Neither team is expected to make a run at the Rose Bowl anytime soon.

Despite improved skill and depth, Washington State was picked to finish last in the North Division, which is where the media tabbed CU to reside in the South Division.

"This is a big game for both programs. I talked to our players about it," CU head coach Jon Embree said. "Playing the first Pac-12 game in the school's history, and with our issues on the road, if we're going to have any chance of accomplishing anything, we've got to win at home."

Before worrying about the burden of taking a 19-game road losing streak to No. 4 Stanford next week, the Buffs have a chance to get off to a fresh 1-0 start in their new conference.

CU is a 3-point favorite at most of the Las Vegas casinos thanks to the homefield advantage.

"Now that I've been with this team for four games, it's amazing the difference when we get on a plane and when we play at home," Embree said.

CU is 78-37-2 all-time in conference openers, including a 5-2 record in a first game as a new league member.

Washington State is 2-2 all-time in Boulder, including a 47-26 win on Sept. 23, 2003.

"This is really the beginning of our Pac-12 experience and our season," CU tight end Matt Bahr said.

Slow starters

Part of the reason CU's running game has struggled is because the team has been playing catch up on the scoreboard due to slow starts.

In the first quarter-and-a-half of the four games this season, the Buffs have been outscored 43-3 and outgained 524 yards to 230 yards. CU's offense has picked up 14 first downs while the defense has allowed 33 first downs in that time frame.

However, in the final two-and-a-half quarters of the four games (including overtime vs. Cal), Embree's team has outscored opponents 89-72 with a significant edge in total yardage (1,246 to 723) and first downs (62 to 44).

Training room

Cornerback Vince Ewing (knee), offensive lineman Shawn Daniels (calf) and cornerback Travis Sandersfeld (leg) are on the mend but not expected to play Saturday.

According to Embree, cornerback Parker Orms could be in the lineup with a "miraculous" recovery from leg injuries.

Starting center Daniel Munyer (ankle) is listed as probable and linebacker David Goldberg (knee) is day-to-day.

Notable

The Buffs are 12-3 at home since 1984 after losing by 20 or more points on the road the previous week (CU is coming off a 37-17 loss at Ohio State.) ... CU's 16 rushing attempts against the Buckeyes are tied for the second fewest in program history. ... Toney Clemons, who transferred to CU from Michigan, will become the first player to ever play in the Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-12.

Quotable

"Their stats are PlayStation kind of numbers. When you watch them, they are explosive," Embree said on Washington State's offense, which has averaged 539.7 yards through three games.

THORBURN: CU Buffs need to start playing like winners

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:



It's Division I football! It's the Big 12! ... Go play intramurals, brother. Go play intramurals.

Outside of Colorado, the previous Buffs' head coach is known more for those words than his failure to bring any of the Boise State magic to Boulder.

Mike Gundy has built a top-10 program in Stillwater working in the shadow of the Oklahoma Sooners. Unless you're a football junky, he's just the "I'm a man, I'm 40" lunatic.

My guess is that most coaches -- aside from Coastal Carolina's David Bennett, who gave us this beauty: "Meow! The cat's still going crazy in there. And I told our players, 'You need to be more like a dog. We don't need a bunch of cats in here.' Meow!" -- are going to make sure going forward that they use clichés at press conferences instead of ending up on YouTube.

But Jon Embree, while lacking the cartoonish delivery, isn't afraid to express his inner football feelings when the cameras are rolling.

Before delving into the first-year Colorado head coach's Tuesday presser, let's revisit Mike Singletary's emotional plea to the San Francisco 49ers three years ago ...

"I'm from the old school. I believe this: I'd rather play with 10 people and just get penalized all the way until we have to do something else, rather than play with 11 when I know that right now that person is not sold out to be a part of this team," the Hall of Fame linebacker said after a lackluster performance by some of his star players. "It is more about them than it is about the team. Cannot play with them. Cannot win with them. Cannot coach with them. Can't do it.

"I want winners! I want people that want to win."

Three days removed from CU's unsavory 37-17 loss to Ohio State, Embree was able to calmly express a similar view.

Contrary to what the 1-3 record screams, the Buffs have some good football players on the roster who are sick and tired of losing. There are also players in the program who work as hard and want to win as much as Embree and Eric Bieniemy did when they were wearing shoulder pads.

How many winners are there? We'll find out who has bought in and who's out this Saturday when CU plays its first official Pac-12 game against Washington State at Folsom Field.

"It's not a right, it's a privilege to play for Colorado. We're not just going to suit you up to suit you up. You've got to earn it and prove that it's important to you," Embree said. "We might be like an NFL team, all of a sudden there are 48 (players) out there."

Embree takes the blame for the special teams fiasco in Columbus. Due to an overall lack of depth in the program, and a fear of losing key players to injuries, inexperienced and/or backup players were given the opportunity to help the team on the kick and coverage units.

"I thought we would have little more depth at certain positions," Embree said when asked about his preseason expectations gone awry. "I thought there are some guys who are backups that would be better and keep pushing themselves. There are some guys that seem to be content being No. 2. I've never understood that."

Now veterans who proved themselves on special teams years ago, like starting safety Ray Polk, will be asked to do more dirty work, in addition to handling their regular responsibilities.

"We've got the conditioning to do it. It's just a new role that we have to fill," Polk said. "I think for a lot of fans it's hard to watch, too. Most of the guys that are playing special teams for us ... they're young, they're still trying to figure out their role on this team, and it was hard to watch."

"But we've got a bunch of upperclassmen coming in on special teams, so it should be a different look this week."

CU's running game, a point of emphasis during spring drills and fall camp, has failed behind an offensive line weakened by injuries.

CU's pass defense, which is preparing for the nation's fourth-ranked air attack, is super model-thin with cornerbacks Parker Orms, Travis Sandersfeld, Vince Ewing, Arthur Jaffee and Jered Bell spending more time together in the training room than on the field this fall.

CU's most talented player, Paul Richardson, has been limited to eight catches and no touchdowns since grabbing the complete attention of opposing defenses with a record-setting performance against Cal.

Despite all of the adversity, Embree still believes in these Buffs. Or at least some of them.

"The right guys are still excited and enthusiastic," he said. "That's a good sign."

Another positive sign, according to Ohio State interim head coach Luke Fickell, is that the big, bad Buckeyes were bruised and battered after Saturday's game.

The Buffs are playing a physical style this season. Now they need to play a smarter brand of football.

And the players deemed worthy of taking the field need to believe they can be successful as much as the head coach believes they can.

"I expected to be sitting here 4-0, that's just me. That's how I go into stuff. If I'm playing Michael Jordan in hoops, just figure out a way. Foul him or something. Make him shoot with his left hand. Whatever it is you can do, right? That's just my mentality," Embree said. "To me, it's getting the rest of the team to truly have these same expectations, to truly have the same feeling or passion that I have about it."

"There's guys that do ... obviously not enough of them feel that way. So I have to continue to try to get everybody to feel that same way."

As Herm Edwards, who Embree worked for with the Kansas City Chiefs, once put it:

"You play to win the game. Hello!"

The fragile Buffs still have a chance to realize their dreams with a fresh start in the Pac-12 looming.

But they've got to start playing like winners, beginning Saturday.



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Buffs, Cougs trying to rediscover winning

By Ted Miller

A string of losing seasons? It wasn't always like this for Colorado and Washington State.

Sure, the Buffaloes haven't posted a winning season since 2005, which wasn't such a great year considering then-coach Gary Barnett was fired before the bowl game of a 7-6 finish. But they split a national title in 1990 and won the Big 12 in 2001.

Sure, the Cougars haven't posted a winning season since 2003. But that was the third of three consecutive 10-win seasons, and the Cougs played in the Rose Bowl after the 1997 and 2002 seasons.

Both programs are trying to crawl out of the dumps, but both fan bases can recall what it's like to be on top. And they're ready to start climbing in a positive direction again.

And it's likely that when Buffs and Cougs fans went through the 2011 schedule in the preseason and registered in their mind's eyes most likely spots to record wins, both wrote a W by Oct. 1, when Washington State visits Colorado for the first Pac-12 conference game in Folsom Field (the California game, again, was a nonconference game and doesn't count in the Pac-12 standings).

Obviously, one team is going to be disappointed, and probably for good reason. It's hard to imagine the loser earning bowl eligibility.

While the Buffs have suffered, and they did go 2-10 in 2006, their fall was not as precipitous as Washington State's. Colorado has won 13 games over the past three years. The Cougars have won five over the same span. Still, new coach Jon Embree almost seems amused with the notion that his players might overlook the Cougs.

"First off, we've only won one game so we can't take anybody lightly," he said. "When I watch them on tape, I see how explosive they are on offense. I really felt like coming into this year, them and Arizona State would be the two most improved teams."

That's fair. While beating Idaho State and UNLV, as Washington State did before losing at San Diego State, doesn't announce a team as a Pac-12 contender, it's worth noting UNLV beat Hawaii by 20 points. That's the same Hawaii team that beat Colorado 34-17 in the season opener.

Last year, the Cougs transformed from grade-A FBS patsy to a competitive team. Now, in order for coach Paul Wulff to keep his job into 2012, the program needs to take the next step, which means winning some games.

"All the parts have improved but we are still nowhere near where we can be and we've got to keep growing," Wulff said.

That growth is best demonstrated by the Cougars not folding after starting quarterback [Jeff Tuel](#) went down in the opener with a broken collarbone. Senior [Marshall Lobbestael](#) has come off the bench and played well, ranking sixth in the nation in passing efficiency.

Said Embree, "That's a testament to Coach Wulff and him getting this program back to where he wants it."

Lobbestael and the Cougars deep receiving corps could be where the game turns. Entering the season, Colorado's biggest question was its secondary. That unit has been adequate, probably better than expected, even with some key injuries. But part of that is not playing good passing teams. While the Buffs haven't given up many passing yards -- 183.5 yards per game is the fewest in the conference -- they also rank only 10th in pass efficiency defense.



Saturday's match may hinge on Marshall Lobbestael and Washington State's passing game.

The Cougs rank No. 1 in the conference in passing efficiency.

That said, the Buffs front seven will challenge the Cougars offensive line. Colorado leads the conference with 14 sacks. It's likely Lobbestael will need to unload quickly, and it would be helpful if he gets some production from his running game.

Speaking of running games, Colorado would prefer not to. Only miserable Arizona has prevented the Buffs from ranking last in rushing in the conference.

Playing at home should make things easier for that offense. In its only other home game so far -- against Cal -- Colorado rolled up 582 yards, including 108 yards rushing.

"If we are going to have any kind of successful season, we have to win home games," Embree said.

The opposite could prove true for Washington State: It must win on the road because a vast majority of its most winnable games on paper -- Colorado, UCLA, Oregon State (in Seattle), California and Washington -- are on the road. That list once included San Diego State, a game in which the Cougs imploded in the fourth quarter.

Washington State has had a bye week to shake off that loss and game plan for the Buffs. It's not melodramatic to say a lot is on the line for Wulff.

The Buffs and Cougs were the preseason picks to finish at the bottom of the South and North Divisions, respectively. The winner Saturday has a much better chance of avoiding that fate.

So, forget about the past, there's plenty of present urgency.
