

Inspiration opportunity: CU Buffs will honor 2001 Big 12 champs before Cal game

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

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The Big 12 Conference might cease to exist in the coming days, weeks or months with its members fleeing for higher ground and more stable footing in healthier leagues, but one of its past champions always will be revered in Boulder.

The 2001 Colorado football team is returning to town this week to be honored at the home opener against California on Saturday afternoon at Folsom Field. Coach Gary Barnett and most of the roster that put a historic whooping on Nebraska and upset Texas to claim the title will reunite just as the 1990 national championship team did last fall.

A handful of players still under contracts in the National Football League and most of the coaching staff from that season won't be able to attend because they will be competing in games elsewhere this weekend, but many familiar faces such as quarterback Bobby Pesavento, running back Bobby Purify, linebacker Sean Tufts and offensive lineman Victor Rogers will be on hand to celebrate the 10th anniversary of a 10-3 season that many believe should have ended with the Buffs playing for the national title.

"It had tremendous resilience," Barnett said of the 2001 team.

The Buffs overcame the loss of two team captains (Jon Minardi and Jashon Sykes) and its starting quarterback (Craig Ochs) to injuries and also the cancellation of a game against Washington State in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Washington State won the Pac-10 that season and a victory over the Cougars might have been enough to vault the Buffs into the national title game.

"It was just one of those teams that was very resilient with sort of a singleness of purpose," Barnett said. "The other theme we had was

'90-10' meaning we would spend 90 percent of our time chasing our dreams and 10 percent of our time on internal issues. We never let internal issues ever be an issue for that football team."

Barnett, who remains a strong advocate of the program even though he was ultimately fired in 2005, said he has remained in contact with many members of the 2001 team and sees a lot of his former players each year when he participates in the annual Buffs4Life weekend. Yet he still expects this reunion to be memorable.

"We just had some good times and some tough times and it creates a bond that you never lose," he said.

Barnett said Pesavento embodied the spirit of the team and was another huge factor in the title run. He was able to come off the bench when Ochs was hurt and play at an equally effective level. In some ways, he might have been more effective.

"We had a bunch of seniors and a good group of seniors who were just determined to go out at the end of their career on top or as close to being on top as possible," Pesavento said. "And lastly, we just had really damn good football players. We had a bunch of guys who were just really good and jelled well together and cheered for one another. It was one of those situations where we would do anything for the guy next to us."

This season's team could learn many lessons from the old Buffs who will be in the locker room with them prior to the Cal game, including how to overcome a loss in the season opener. Jon Embree's team lost its first game at Hawaii just as the 2001 team dropped its opener at home to Fresno State.

The 2001 Buffs then reeled off five straight victories before their next loss at Texas. Some might believe that 41-7 humbling was the key moment that set up the run to the title at the end of the year, but Barnett and his players agree it was a raucous halftime locker room at Oklahoma State when the team truly found itself.

The Buffs were trailing 16-7 when they entered the locker room. Offensive line coach Steve Marshall suggested the

coaching staff should allow the players to talk among themselves. Senior Victor Rogers took the lead and coaches never said a word until the team was back on the field.

"I think that was the moment when we realized, 'Hey, we're really in the mix and can do something special this year, but this game matters,'" Pesavento said. "I remember to this day Victor Rogers being one the biggest catalysts of that halftime with guys yelling and screaming and challenging one another to show up in the second half."

The Buffs won the game 22-19 to start another five-game winning streak. The span included two of the most historic victories for the Colorado program.

While the Buffs ultimately won the conference championship in Dallas against Texas, avenging their earlier loss to the Longhorns, it is the regular-season finale many Buffs fans still treasure most in scrapbooks and memories.

The Buffs demolished No. 1-ranked Nebraska at Folsom Field. The score of the game, 62-36, has become iconic in CU lore. The Buffs ran for eight touchdowns and 380 yards against the Cornhuskers, with tailback Chris Brown scoring six times.

Asked what allowed the 2001 team to accomplish all that it did, former linebacker Sean Tufts said, "The offensive line."

"I think we had a core group of seniors that were fantastic leaders," he said. "After that, we just had a lot of really talented, driven guys. I think most of that team (starters) was drafted or played in the NFL. I think the summation of that was those seniors who were really, really strong. They taught us the way that Buff football should be played."

The Buffs were crowned champions a week later in Dallas after beating the Longhorns 39-37 behind another strong outing from Brown buoyed by an opportunistic defense.

However, they were forced to watch Nebraska advance to the national title game against Miami in one of the greatest blunders ever produced by the Bowl Championship Series system. It allowed a team that finished second in its division and lost its final regular-season game by 26 points to play for the title.

Meanwhile, the Buffs fell flat in the Fiesta Bowl having had the wind taken out of their sails and lost to Oregon 38-16.

"It bothered me more at the time than it does now because I've seen other inequities occur and I've realized that it's just part of life," Barnett said of being left out of the national title game. "I don't think that sort of thing could happen again, even though they didn't make a rule against it. But I don't think that would be acceptable procedure now. So in a way, maybe we changed something in that process, but it really bothered me at the time."

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Cal first team to bring former CU Buffs back

Kiesau, Ambrose may give Bears advantage in Saturday's game

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

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Gary Barnett and his 2001 Big 12 Conference championship football team won't be the only former Colorado Buffaloes returning to Folsom Field this season.

The 2011 team hosts its first home game this week against California, which is where two members of the 2010 CU coaching staff landed after being fired along with former coach Dan Hawkins.

Former offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau and former secondary coach Ashley Ambrose were on the CU sideline last season when the Buffs traveled to Berkeley and were trounced 52-7. They hope to help the Bears reprise that performance Saturday in the thin air of Boulder.

Kiesau, who came to CU from Cal in 2006, is in his second stint with the Bears under coach Jeff Tedford. He is once again coaching wide receivers and serving as passing game coordinator.

Ambrose is coaching the Cal secondary after serving one season as the Buffs secondary coach and two others as an intern in Boulder.

While the schemes are different this season at CU under coach Jon Embree, Kiesau and Ambrose are very familiar with the players on the Colorado roster and their abilities. Knowing what throws CU quarterback Tyler Hansen struggles to make and what route combinations CU defensive backs have had trouble against in the past will serve as a small advantage for the Bears.

But Colorado also has a coach who switched sidelines in the year since these teams last played. Offensive line coach Steve Marshall will probably be a big help to CU defensive coaches this week.

Other former Buffs coaches and players will return to Folsom Field with opponents later this season.

Former offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich, who served in that role for three seasons under Hawkins will return to Boulder with Oregon in October. Former CU wide receivers coach Ted Gilmore, who spent the past six seasons at Nebraska, is in his first season coaching USC wideouts this fall. The Trojans play a Friday night game beneath the flatirons Nov. 4.

The most emotional return this season will come in mid-November when former CU safety Ryan Walters travels to Boulder with Arizona on

Nov. 12. Walters is one of the youngest assistant coaches in the nation in the Bowl Championship subdivision. He is in his first season as secondary coach for the Wildcats.

Walters' father, Marc, also played for the Buffs in the 1980s. He was a senior in 1986 along with CU head coach Jon Embree.

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CU Buffs eye ... The Bears

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For the record: After a 36-21 victory over Fresno State in San Francisco, California is 1-0 overall (0-0 in the Pac-12).

Streaking: Receivers Keenan Allen (eight catches, 112 yards) and Marvin Jones (five catches, 118 yards) became the first Cal duo to top the century mark since DeSean Jackson and Lavelle Hawkins against Minnesota in 2006.

Who's hot: In his Cal debut, junior quarterback Zach Maynard passed for 266 yards and two touchdowns against Fresno State. He also rushed for 52 yards on six carries. Maynard, a transfer from Buffalo, is the half-brother of Allen.

Who's not: We're being picky here, but Cal was penalized 11 times for 90 yards against Fresno State.

Key stat: Cal entered the season with concerns about its unproven running backs, but junior Isi Sofole rushed for 88 yards and two touchdowns against Fresno State.

FYI: The game between now Pac-12 foes Colorado and Cal this weekend likely will confuse many fans because it won't count as a conference game. It was originally scheduled as a nonleague game — a rematch of last year's 52-7 Cal win over CU in Berkeley — and after Colorado joined the Pac-12, the teams failed to find suitable replacements.

Injury report: None reported by the Bears.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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CU Buffs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy vows improvement

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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HONOLULU — More than 30 minutes after a 34-17 loss to Hawaii, Colorado offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy emerged from the team locker room Saturday night still shaking his head.

Bieniemy's career debut as a play-caller became a game he'd like to forget — after he uses the film as a teaching tool, that is. Colorado arrived at Aloha Stadium feeling confident. The Buffaloes departed after netting just 240 yards of offense.

Colorado trailed 17-0 at halftime. Six of CU's seven penalties were committed before the break. Balls were bobbled during two plays in the first quarter. There was no chance to seize momentum or sustain a drive.

Against a good team, falling behind by more than two touchdowns usually becomes too much to overcome. That proved to be the case here. In separate preseason polls, Hawaii was picked by the Western Athletic Conference coaches and media as the favorite to win the league title. The Warriors were aiming for a payback after losing 31-13 in Boulder last season.

First-year Colorado coach Jon Embree talked about throwing the first punch. The Buffs

whiffed.

"We've got to be better from the start, and that goes all the way around," Bieniemy said. "We've got to do better coaching. We've got to get better playing. We've got to get better at executing. On top of that, we're a much more disciplined football team than what we showed tonight.

"What does that mean? It means we have to go back to the drawing board to make sure that we're giving ourselves a chance to have a chance. When we're efficiently and effectively doing our jobs, we're pretty good. But when we're not, the Colorado Buffaloes are beating the Colorado Buffaloes."

It didn't help that Colorado lost its starting left tackle, sophomore David Bakhtiari, in the first half to a knee injury. (The severity of the injury was not announced.) But the Buffs did show some life in the second half.

Two touchdown passes from senior

quarterback Tyler Hansen to sophomore wide receiver Paul Richardson and a 34-yard field goal by true freshman Will Oliver pulled the Buffs to within 24-17 just seconds into the fourth quarter.

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Hawaii punt returner Scott Harding is swarmed by Buffaloes, including Josh Ford (29), in the third quarter Saturday night. (Marco Garcia, The Associated Press)

"We were feeling good at that point," Hansen said. "We got into some rhythm. We were doing some things."

The Colorado defense then did its part, forcing a three-and-out punt. CU took over on its 21-yard line and promptly moved backward 17 yards — after two sacks and a delay-of-game penalty. Hawaii took advantage of good field position on the possession exchange and moved 45 yards on eight plays for the game-clinching score.

"In the first game, it took a little while for us to find our niche," CU quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer said. "But once we started executing (in the second half), it's amazing what happens. When we got (the deficit) to seven points, I really felt good. We were in a flow."

"We have to build on this. The old cliché is that

you improve the most between your first and second games, and that's even more so when you're installing a new system. We have a better idea of what we are and what we need to do."

Scherer said he was impressed with Bieniemy's first go-round in calling the offensive plays. Early during August camp, Scherer said of the former Colorado All-American and NFL running backs coach: "Eric really has a solid foundation of knowledge. In my experience, most running back coaches tend to have a very narrow focus of the game. But Eric has a very broad perspective. He has a good understanding of a lot of things."

Communication-wise, Bieniemy said everything went smoothly in his play-calling debut. But the team must dramatically improve on its execution Saturday in Colorado's 1:30 p.m. home opener against California (1-0) at Folsom Field.

Strangely, this year's game against Cal will not count in the Pac-12 standings. It was originally scheduled as a nonconference game, and when the Pac-12 was formed, both teams were unsuccessful in finding suitable replacements for this date. But that doesn't lessen the importance for Colorado. It's an opportunity to get back on track.

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better," Bieniemy said Saturday night. "We have to hold everybody accountable for what happened, and that starts with me. I promise you, we will get better. We will get better."

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