

Football: CU Buffs defense looks to step up against Washington

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

On Saturday night, the Washington football team put 34 points on the board in a win against Utah.

For the Huskies, that's an offensive explosion -- the most points they've scored on anybody in the Pac-12 this year.

Should Washington put up 34 points again on Saturday at Colorado, the Buffaloes would probably feel that's a job well done.

Defensively, it's been an historically bad year for Colorado (1-9, 1-6 Pac-12), which was torched in a 56-31 loss at Arizona on Saturday.

Consider the following:

The Buffs are allowing 47.2 points per game, currently on pace to shatter the school record of 41.0 in 1980. CU would need to hold Washington and Utah to fewer than 20 points -- combined -- to avoid breaking that mark.

Ranking last (124th) nationally in scoring defense, CU is allowing more points than any BCS conference team in more than two decades.

Since Louisiana-Lafayette set an NCAA Division I record by allowing 50.3 points per game in 1997, only one Division I team has been worse than CU has been this year. North Texas gave up an average of 47.6 points in 2008.

CU is losing by an average of 29.6 points. Since 1999, just one Pac-10/12 team has topped that. Washington State was outscored by 31.1 points per game in 2008.

There is perhaps a bit of good news on the way, however.

The Buffs are done playing offensive juggernauts. During their current six-game losing streak, the Buffs played the top six scoring teams in the conference. Five of those six rank among the top 30 nationally.

Now comes Washington (6-4, 4-3). The Huskies are yet another bowl-eligible foe, but they haven't exactly scared anybody offensively. Even with Saturday's win, the Huskies are 10th in the Pac-12 in scoring (22.0 per game) and 10th in yards (342.4 per game). Those are first quarter numbers for Oregon.

Prior to Saturday's 34-15 win against Utah, the Huskies had scored more than 21 points just one other time this season. They rolled past Portland State 52-13 in September.

Arizona, which has one of the worst defenses in the country, held the Huskies to 17 points. Cal has given up more than 30 points per game, but held the Huskies to 21.

The Buffs would welcome similar success. So far this season, they've allowed at least 30 points to nine of their 10 opponents, and have yielded at least 42 points to seven of them.

Despite the ugly numbers, linebacker Derrick Webb is still hopeful the defense can rise up and stop somebody this season.

"We put it all out there every game and we will continue to do that the last two games," he said after Saturday's loss to Arizona. "We have been through a lot and we just have to continue to come back and play hard the next game. We won't give up."

Of course, while Colorado may look at the Huskies as somewhat of a break, the Huskies are sure to be licking their chops at the prospect of facing Colorado.

After scoring 34 points against the No. 4 defense in the conference, the Huskies now get to face the worst defense in the country -- and with renewed confidence after quarterback Keith Price had what coach Steve Sarkisian described as "far and away Keith's best game of the year."

And don't forget, Price did throw for 257 yards and four touchdowns in a 52-24 win against the Buffs a year ago. That was Washington's highest scoring conference game since 1997.

Maybe the news isn't good for CU, after all.

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CU Buffs eye on... Washington Huskies

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Washington at Colorado, 11:30 a.m., Saturday, FX

For the record: Washington is 6-4 and 4-3 in the Pac-12, in fourth place in the North Division, after Saturday's 34-15 win over Utah.

Streaking: The Huskies have won three in a row to become bowl eligible for the third consecutive year under fourth-year coach Steve Sarkisian. A win Saturday would give Washington its first four-game win streak since the end of the 2010 season.

Who's hot: Tailback Bishop Sankey rushed for 162 yards against Utah and has 1,017 yards this season.

Who's not: Washington is last in the league in net punting at 33.4. Junior college transfer Travis Coons, who has had one punt blocked, has been kicking in place of freshman Korey Durkee.

Key stat: 372.9. Yards given up per game by a defense that has drastically improved under first-year coordinator Justin Wilcox, who came over from Tennessee. A year ago, Washington was 11th in the Pac-12 at 453.3 yards per game but still walloped Colorado 52-24 in Seattle.

FYI: Tight end Austin Seferian-Jenkins caught seven passes Saturday for 96 for his career, topping Mark Bruener's 1991-94 school record of 95.

Injury report: Out for the season are TB Jesse Callier (knee), DE Hau'oli Jamora (knee), RB Deontae Cooper (knee), WR James Johnson (wrist), OL Erik Kohler (knee), OL Colin Tanigawa (knee) and DL Lawrence Lagafuaina (leg).

Coachspeak: "We're playing pretty good." Steve Sarkisian

John Henderson, The Denver Post