

CU Buffs coach Jon Embree has proof that the program can recover

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

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BOULDER — On their way to a 1-7 record and potentially the worst football season in school history, it seems hope for the Colorado Buffaloes is in as short supply as tackles and sustained drives.

CU's last five losses have been by an average score of 56-13. The Buffs have the worst scoring and pass defense in the country. And the head coach is contemplating a change at quarterback. Next up is a Saturday home game against No. 15-ranked Stanford (6-2, 4-1), in control of its destiny in the Pac-12's North Division. CU is a 28-point underdog. And it's homecoming for the Buffs.

Holding the flickering beacon of hope like a torch in a hurricane is second-year CU coach Jon Embree. Yes, he talks about developing the young talent and sending the seniors out right. But he has some proof that things can change.

"I've been through that as a player too," Embree said. "My first two years here at Colorado were similar to this."

In 1984, Embree was a sophomore tight end and the leading receiver for a CU team that went 1-10, matching the Buffs' worst record. They lost at Notre Dame 55-14 and at Missouri 52-7.

Coach Bill McCartney, in his third year, was on the hot seat. The Buffs hadn't been to a bowl game since the 1976 season. Interest, not to mention hope, was waning.

"I remember sitting on the bus listening to the Missouri postgame show," Embree said. "The year before it was 59-20. So here it is, back-to-back years, they put 50-some points on us and they weren't really trying and (they were) talking about how we were a tuneup game for them to get ready for Nebraska.

"Then we proceeded to go (12) straight years beating them."

The next year, CU pounded Missouri 38-7, went 7-5 and played in the Freedom Bowl to start a string of 11 bowls in 12 seasons. In 1986, Embree's senior year, the Buffs beat Nebraska for the first time in 19 years. Four years later, they won their only national title.

"I think of those times all the time, even before I was in this position," Embree said. "When I share some of those experiences with our younger guys and say I know it's going to be better and we're going to be OK, there's some validity to it."

CU's 1984 team had similarities to this one. However down people are on junior quarterback Jordan Webb, he had better numbers than Steve Vogel. The senior hit only 45 percent for 179 yards per game with nine touchdown passes and eight interceptions. Tailback Lee Rouson, a senior, averaged only 72.5 yards per game.

"We have better players," Embree said. "The resolve is similar. We have similar type leaders in the younger classes. It was unique because I was in Coach Mac's first recruiting class and then the class that came in behind us, there was a different kind of bond. We did a lot of stuff together.

"I see that with a lot of the guys who are here now."

One of those players is true freshman Christian Powell, the Buffs' leading rusher. He's averaging 67.3 yards per

game.

"It's a different time period, but it's the same exact thing," Powell said. "(Embree) tells us all the time that he went through exactly what we're going through, so he knows that it's tough right now but if we keep working at it, we can turn it around."

There are a couple of differences, however. It was McCartney's third year, not his second. He had an extra recruiting class under him. Also, the Buffs' 1984 defense was much better than this one. It allowed an average of 395.2 yards and 33.1 points per game in a league, the Big Eight, that boasted No. 4 Nebraska, No. 6 Oklahoma and No. 7 Oklahoma State.

This year's CU defense is allowing an average of 505 yards and 46 points per game, both on pace for the worst in school history.

"We all listen to Coach Embree, but at the same time it was two different time periods," said senior linebacker Doug Rippy. "The game changed so dramatically after he played."

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Football: CU Buffs' Yuri Wright staying hungry despite struggles

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Yuri Wright has had to get used to a lot in his first six months as a college student and football player, but one of the biggest changes in his life is something he has no plans to get used to.

Wright has already experienced more losing -- and by much bigger margins -- than he did in his two years of playing a significant role for his high school team, national power Don Bosco Prep in New Jersey.

"It's rough, but you've just got to keep fighting," Wright said after a practice this week. "You can't give up. Just because you've been winning all your life, there is times when you're going to be down. You just got to keep fighting and one day you will get back to where you were."

Wright was the highest rated recruit in Colorado's 2012 recruiting class. PrepStar named him to its "Dream Team" as the No. 2 cornerback in the nation and the 52nd best player overall. Two-thirds of the way through his first college season, he understands as well as anyone how meaningless those rankings and accolades are on the field on Saturdays.

He and the rest of his teammates have experienced more of their share of hang-your-head results in producing a 1-7 record. The CU defense has been historically bad, in part, because of the learning curve Wright and his fellow freshmen are experiencing.

Wright has played in six of the Buffs' eight games and has been on the field on defense for 220 snaps, making 13 tackles, including one for a loss. He missed the Arizona State and USC games because of a concussion suffered in practice, but he returned to start against Oregon last week.

He was now started games at both cornerback spots, three on the right side and once on the left, where he is the probable starter again this week when Stanford visits Folsom Field on Saturday.

Wright set career highs in playing time and tackles last week at Oregon when he was on the field for all 75 snaps and recorded four stops. He said he hasn't doubted his physical abilities at this level. He said he had played against some of the Ducks in high school all-star games and went into last week's game feeling confident he had the tools to make plays.

He's trying to do all he can to improve the mental side of the game, which will allow him to rely more freely on his remarkable athleticism.

"Just keep improving and keep working hard and get in the play book," Wright said. "Just keep getting better every day and keep learning. Once we do that and combine it all together, you will definitely see a change in us. I think by next year we'll be a pretty good team."

Coach Jon Embree has said numerous times this season he believes the program has a bright future on defense when Wright and some of his fellow freshmen mature. Wright's classmates Kenneth Crawley and Marques Mosley also have started games in the secondary this season and defensive linemen Josh Tupou and Samson Kafovalu have started in the trenches.

While Embree is disappointed in the results his team is producing, he is excited about development he says he sees in many of the young players on the team. Embree says he plans to make cut-up videos of the freshmen playing

this season and show them to players next year.

"And they will be able to see the difference when they watch that they will say, 'That is not me, I am way better than that now,'" Embree said. "It is true, when you watch yourself as you evolve as a player, you will be shocked at some of the stuff you put on tape, when you first start playing. It will blow your mind because you realize how much better you are and again that will help give them confidence.

"There is a lot that will go into it, the good thing is they don't go into it alone, that is when it is hard, they are all going through it together, so they all help each other get through it."

Wright described himself as "hungry" to get his hands on the ball before his freshman season ends. Some of his best friends on the team have been able to do so already. Crawley is the team's primary punt returner, though he has returned just nine punts. Mosley is the only freshman defensive back to make an interception so far.

"If I get it, I'm taking it back to the house," Wright said. "I'm looking for a pick-six."

His plan for making it happen is simple.

"Just do your job," he said. "If you do your job, things will come your way. I think if I stay consistent in doing my job, then it will pay off and I'll end up with a few interceptions and maybe fumbles."

Notable

Embree said he will make a game-time decision regarding who to start at quarterback this week. Regardless of who starts, Embree said he expects both junior Jordan Webb and sophomore Nick Hirschman to play.

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