

Football: CU Buffs' Nick Kasa showing he has NFL skills

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

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Colorado's aggressive, athletic defensive end turned tight end is an intriguing prospect for NFL general managers to consider this spring.

The 6-6, 260-pound senior leads the Buffs' woeful passing offense in highlights this season with 20 receptions for 340 yards (17.0 yards per) and three touchdowns. Kasa's 70-yard touchdown at Washington State made his teammates believers as they completed a dramatic fourth-quarter comeback for CU's only win of the season.

So how good can Kasa be once he masters his new position?

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Jon Embree said during his Tuesday press conference that CU has petitioned the NCAA to grant Kasa a fifth year of eligibility. The program's last five-star recruit never redshirted and was often injured during his career.

Kasa has already moved on.

"It's not going to happen. I've tried and it won't happen," Kasa said.

CU's coaching staff is under fire entering Friday's finale against Utah at Folsom Field. Embree will probably have to make major staff changes to return as head coach for a third season.

J.D. Brookhart, whose duties include coaching the tight ends, deserves credit for developing Kasa at an accelerated rate.

"I've talked to J.D. about it every week," Kasa said of what he needs to do to make it in the NFL. Brookhart began his coaching career with the Denver Broncos. "He's been there before and he pushes me to my limits. He's great with it and I know that he's going to get me there."

Kasa's strengths right now are his impressive speed for a big man and run blocking. He should fare very well at CU's pro timing day and if invited to the NFL combine this winter.

However, due to the offensive line's early struggles, an absurd quarterback rotation and the lack of a consistent running game, there haven't been a lot of explosive plays or even completions in the passing game.

CU has the worst scoring offense (16.3 ppg) in the country and is last in the Pac-12 in passing offense (182.2 ypg).

"It hurts losing Kasa because I think he was improving and getting better as the year goes on," said Embree, a former tight end at CU and in the NFL. "I don't think anybody outside of the football offices thought that he would be an impactful player like he was."

Kasa has been a bright spot at times. But a concussion sustained early in the Arizona game prevented him from enhancing his statistics as part of the Buffs' best offensive performance of the season against the Wildcats' woeful defense.

"After the season is done, I'm still not done. I know that, and I think everybody knows that," Kasa said. "I've just got to keep going as hard as I can and see what happens. I hope (the NFL) sees me as a good prospect."

Senior safety Ray Polk, who switched from running back to the defensive side of the ball early in his CU career, said Kasa can be a nightmare to deal with in practice.

"He has done more than what was expected. It's great and I couldn't be happier for him," Polk said. "Honestly, he's a great player for us. A lot of people knew he was an athlete but wondered if he could make that transition over to tight end. He did it and he's been amazing. He's been killing it there."

Kasa's last chance to put some draft-worthy footage on tape will be against a Utes defense ranked fifth in the conference.

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"I've had tons of fun. I do wish that I could have another year and get the chance to make up for this one," Kasa said. "It wasn't what any of us wanted, but I've had as much fun this year as I've had here because I love playing tight end."

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Colorado on doorstep of infamy before Utah game

ARNIE STAPLETON - AP Sports Writer (AP)

Thursday, November 22, 2012

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — The Colorado Buffaloes are counting on the past repeating itself so they can avoid ending up on the wrong side of history.

To avoid the worst record since the program's inception in 1890, the Buffs will have to upset Utah, which was installed as a three-touchdown favorite Friday at Folsom Field.

The Utes were also a 21-point favorite a year ago when the Buffaloes ended their division title hopes with a 17-14 win at Salt Lake City to end a school-record 23-game road losing streak.

"We had nothing to lose," senior defensive end Will Pericak said.

And this time, they have infamy to avoid.

If the Utes (4-7, 2-6 Pac-12) win, the Buffaloes (1-10, 1-7) will go winless at home for the first time since 1920.

"We can't be the only team to lose every game at home. I don't think anybody wants that so we're all pretty motivated," senior tight end Nick Kasa said. "We know that they're still motivated from last year, probably pretty angry about that. This is our rivalry game; we just have to win it."

The Buffaloes have been outscored by an average of 46-16, and they've lost seven straight since their lone win, 35-34 at Washington State. During that streak, they've allowed an average of more than 50 points.

Last week, they hit a new low when a miscommunication from the sideline led to the Buffs running a quarterback sneak on first down that gained about a foot.

All this losing has gotten to the Buffs, who started the season with hopes of a bowl bid before losses to archrival Colorado State and lower-tier Sacramento State were followed by a 55-point defeat at Fresno State.

"Yeah, it's really embarrassing," junior defensive back Terrell Smith said. "It stinks to be categorized as the worst team, but there is nothing that we can do."

Except win.

"It would be tough" to go down as the first 11-loss team in school history, Pericak said.

"That would not be something we want," he said. "It's horrible to think about. I know for a fact that we're getting better, so I don't want to think about that really."

If they're getting better, it sure isn't showing up on game day.

The Utes, coming off a 34-24 loss to Arizona at home last week, are also wrapping up a disappointing season.

"We wanted to have the seniors go out of their home stadium on a positive note. We didn't get that done. We got one more opportunity to send them out on a positive note," Utes coach Kyle Whittingham said.

The Buffaloes, though, are motivated by avoiding infamy.

"What I've been telling the guys is I don't even want you to play for me or just play for the seniors," said Kasa, one of just eight seniors on the Buffaloes roster. "Play for yourselves. Because we can't be that team that never won at home. That's just embarrassing to me and to this team. And I think everybody knows that. We're going to go out and get this win."

The Utes have also had a tough transition to the Pac-12 after leaving the Mountain West Conference last year, though not as difficult a road as Colorado has had since bolting the Big 12, igniting the wave of conference realignment.

"The league is much better this year than it was last year, across the board," Whittingham said. "I can't speak for Colorado, but for us the league is elevated. There's no doubt about that. We're still working hard to get to the level we need to be at."

The Utes will gain a measure of satisfaction, though, if they can win at Boulder, where the Buffaloes have lost conference games by 28, 34, 48 and 35 points.

"Colorado in the past has been a big program just like us," Utah wide receiver Kenneth Scott said. "They feel like they should be one of the top programs just like we feel that. But going into this game we have a chip on our shoulder knowing we should be winning, but we are making those little mistakes. ... Especially coming off last year, the way they beat us, that revenge is going to be really nice."

AP Sports Writer Lynn DeBruin contributed.

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Eight seniors on CU Buffs football team bowing out Friday vs. Utah

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — For eight Colorado seniors, it hasn't just been a long year. It's been a long career. No bowl games. Only 12 victories. A free fall that has the Buffaloes one loss in Friday's season finale against Utah at Folsom Field from hitting a historical low.

"It's been a long road," said senior safety Ray Polk. "It's been a crazy, twisted, long road."

This is CU's smallest senior class since 1995, largely a result of a No. 15-ranked recruiting class five years ago that was decimated by defections, injuries and players hurried onto the field without redshirting as the program collapsed under former Buffs coach Dan Hawkins.

Asked to pick a Kodak moment, Polk, one of the most quotable Buffs, was nearly speechless. What was it? Beating Georgia on national TV in 2010? Knocking Utah out of the Pac-12 championship game last year to end a 24-game road losing streak?

Finally, he said, "Last year was a great time for me because it was enough adversity to still be functional and overcome. It was a grind every week."

For four years — five years if they redshirted — it's been a grind for the CU seniors. They watched the Hawkins era crash and burn with five consecutive losing seasons, then ushered in Jon Embree, whose first two CU teams have stretched the streak to a school-record seven straight. And they're finishing on an all-time low. CU (1-10) is trying to avoid its worst record ever.

And yet, their careers could have been so much better.

"When you really analyze it, you forget how close things are from going here or here," said linebacker Jon Major. "For example, my true freshman year, even though I didn't play, Nebraska makes a 50-something-yard field goal and that's the game that would get us to a bowl game. (Alex Henery) just had the kick of his life. It's crazy. Stuff like that happens all the time."

"Two years ago we gave up that huge (28-point) lead to Kansas. Well, that's our bowl game right there. It's been tough because everything's been on the bubble."

When did the bubble burst? Many moments come to mind for these seniors, but Game 1 this year would make most lists. Colorado's loss to a woeful Colorado State team in its own rebuilding mode under a first-year head coach, Jim McElwain, put the Buffs on a downward spiral. Almost as soon as the season began, spirits sagged.

Years from now, CU's eight seniors might look back at losing to Sacramento State at home this year, trailing Fresno State 55-7 at halftime, allowing 70 points to Oregon and watching nearly every school rewrite its offensive record book against them.

One game, however, represents the abyss.

"Fresno State," said tight end Nick Kasa. "We were killing ourselves. They were a great team, but we pretty much lost the game terribly."

Added Polk: "Fresno State was bad just because I just had never seen our team in that state before. They were a good team and made plays and we just couldn't get things going. That was a bad moment."

They all know what's ahead.

A loss to Utah, a 23-point favorite, and the Buffs' 1-11 record will be the school's worst. (Unless an 0-4 season in 1890 is counted.)

But the players think hitting rock bottom will produce a bounce. They see signs of hope.

"It's shooting up," Kasa said. "You don't know it now because we have a lot of young guys, but the guys we have are going to be great."

Some of CU's promising young players are true freshman tailback Christian Powell and tight end Vincent Hobbs and sophomore cornerback Greg Henderson.

"There's nowhere to go but up," Polk said. "It's been a hard year for us."

Years from now, when they return for reunions, maybe they will share a laugh — like recalling a vacation that went horribly wrong.

"No regrets," said senior defensive tackle Will Pericak. "We play hard. I'm proud to be a Buffalo. I have a ton of good memories and had fun playing here."

Injury report. Powell, CU's leading rusher and scorer, is listed as doubtful for Friday's season finale because of a concussion. Powell has 691 yards rushing and seven touchdowns. He was hurt late in Saturday's 38-3 loss to Washington. If he is unable to play against the Utes, he will be replaced by sophomore Tony Jones or true freshman Donta Abron.

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