



CU linebacker Derrick Webb (1) is preparing for ASU's zone-read option offense.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Buffs 'D' Braces For ASU's Pace, Zone Option

Release: 10/09/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - Up-tempo, spread offenses are all the rage in college football and even at the next level, and the Colorado Buffaloes already have encountered a handful of them in September. And that's exactly what they've been for the Buffs - a real handful.

More are on the way, beginning with Arizona State's tricked-out version that will visit Folsom Field on Thursday night (7 p.m., ESPN). The Sun Devils can be a defensive coordinator's nightmare, which CU's Greg Brown has been living for the past week as he prepares for one of the Pac-12 Conference's most explosive teams.

Brown's boss - head coach Jon Embree - said the Sun Devils "pose a few different problems with the way they run their spread offense. They're a little different from what UCLA did, so we have to do a good job with our assignments."

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UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley ran the zone-read option a little too effectively to suit Brown two weekends ago. Hundley accounted for four touchdowns (two running, two passing) and 295 total yards (281 passing) in the Bruins' 42-14 win.

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Brown expects his defense will get a strong dose of the same stuff - with a twist or three - from ASU's Taylor Kelly, who ranks fourth in total offense in the Pac-12. Kelly averages 287.0 yards a game, Hundley is a spot above him at 317.5.

CU linebacker Derrick Webb termed ASU's offense "pretty similar to UCLA's . . . they've got an athletic quarterback who can run the zone read. He's good at carrying out fakes, hiding who has the ball. We have to play disciplined, sound defense. Everyone has a job and we're facing an offense that has multiple options for each play. We faced maybe three zone read teams this season already. I feel pretty good about where we are and what we've seen. We should have a better idea of what to expect."

Brown was familiar with ASU's 2011 offense, which featured future Bronco Brock Osweiler but not as much zone-read option as it does now with Kelly. Brown knew former ASU offensive coordinator Noel Mazzone, who since has taken the same job at UCLA. The Sun Devils, said Brown, "are doing some of the same things, but it seems they're finding ways of taking it to a new level. This offense has an extreme amount of misdirection. They run more option than what UCLA and Mazzone did at Arizona State, even though UCLA ran more this year than what Noel did a year ago at ASU with Brock Osweiler."

Here's what Brown has outlined for his defense in terms of what to expect from ASU's options: the zone read, the split zone read and the power 'O' read - "That's the main play that Cam Newton ran at Auburn (during the Tigers' recent BCS title run)," Brown said. "And they have many branches off that tree as far as what the quarterback can do with the ball."

The Buffs can start with these: After he reads the defense, Kelly can handoff the ball to running back DJ Foster or he can keep it and run himself. Kelly can keep the ball, throw to a receiver in the flat - a bubble screen. Or he can throw to an outside receiver who fakes a block, then heads downfield.

"You've got a lot of options off of each player," Brown said, and ASU's offensive statistics suggest that most of them work. The Sun Devils are averaging 38.4 points (second in the conference) and 456.2 yards (fifth).

CU senior safety Ray Polk, who hopes to play Thursday night for the first time since the first quarter of the opener when he suffered a high ankle sprain, said spread offenses can be vastly different. ASU's strong suit, he said, is "misdirection . . . you have to adjust all this stuff that's embedded in their game plan. It's a great team we're playing. It is a spread offense, but you've got to understand the little trickeries that they want to do."

Much of the Bruins' productivity two weekends ago resulted from the Buffs' poor tackling - something Embree hopes was remedied during the bye week. Tackling was emphasized, along with an increase in "live" work during other periods. But how more practice contact translates to game night won't be known until Thursday, when the nation is watching.

CU's defense is laden with freshmen, but Embree said his younger players, for the most part, are adjusting to their zone-read assignments and the speed of up-tempo offenses. "I think when you look at our last game our issues weren't necessarily assignment issues, it was physical issues (tackling)," he said. "For our younger guys in the backend (secondary), you just have to simplify, which we've done with some of the coverages . . .

"I'm pleased with our young guys this year and how they've played on both sides of the football. They have represented themselves well . . . yeah, they've made mistakes, but I see a lot of them making plays."

The increasing number of up-tempo, varied spread offenses has forced head coaches and defensive coordinators to put a premium on speed. Embree said he and Brown are conscious of needing an overall upgrade there

through recruiting. Also, a pair of former safeties - Kyle Washington and Paul Vigo - shifted to linebacker to add speed and versatility to that position.

"You have to have versatility in your players," Embree said. "You need those body types (Vigo, Washington) to help combat what these offenses do. You need guys that can cover, yet are big enough to do some stuff in the run game . . . when you look at other teams around the conference and the things that they do, it's more of that all-around athlete on defense now. It has to be speed first and size second. Hopefully you get the total package.

"You've got to keep recruiting speed and that's something that we've talked about from day one since we've been here. We aren't where we need to be from that standpoint. We need to continue to improve that. You have to have speed. With the tempo and them spreading you out, there are a couple of times that we had the opportunity to make a tackle for a no gain (against UCLA) and it ended up being about a 10-yard gain one time and about a 15-yard gain another time and it was a scheme where our guy just wasn't fast enough. You don't fix that in the weight room. You have to go out and recruit that. That's something we'll address on the recruiting standpoint on the defensive side."

BUFF BITS: Embree's Tuesday media luncheon was held for the first time this season at the UMC, attracting a crowd of about 300 . . . Also featured Tuesday were men's basketball player Spencer Dinwiddie, a sophomore who is moving to point guard this season, and women's basketball coach Linda Lappe. Both touted Friday night's Buffs Madness, which will follow the volleyball match (7 p.m.) at the Coors Events Center . . . Embree believes ASU defensive tackle Will Sutton, a 6-1, 267-pound junior, is the best defensive lineman in the Pac-12. "He's dominant . . . I love his spirit," Embree said. Sutton is the Sun Devils' second-leading tackler (34, 21 solo) and leads the team in tackles for loss (10) and QB sacks (6.5) . . . The Buffs were an effective screen pass team last season, but haven't enjoyed much success with the play this season. Embree said former QB Tyler Hansen and tailback Rodney Stewart developed a chemistry for executing the play that hasn't yet developed between QB Jordan Webb and his tailbacks. "We're not getting what we need out of the screen game," Embree said. "We're working on it."

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SHOW MENU



Running back lost starting job after getting injured

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Tony Jones began the year as the starting tailback for the Colorado Buffaloes.

An injury to Jones and a breakout game from freshman Christian Powell changed those plans.

Now five games into the season, Jones is doing what he can to still make an impact for CU (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12).

"I'm working my way back up," Jones said. "I'm just going to continue to stay focused and not let the negative things take control of me."

Jones had 16 rushing attempts for 43 yards in the season opener against Colorado State. He also caught four passes for 29 yards in that game. He had just 22 offensive touches since then.

With Jones hobbled with an injury, he had just two rushing attempts and two catches -- totaling 5 yards in offense -- in Week 2 against Sacramento State. Powell, meanwhile, got the start at tailback and rushed for 147 yards and three touchdowns.

Powell has been the starter ever since, while Jones has taken a backup role. To his credit, Jones has continued to work hard in practice.

"He was down (about it)," CU head coach Jon Embree said. "I talked to him after the Fresno State game (which Jones missed because of injury) about seeing how he can get back to what he needs to do and some of the things I saw he could change and improve on. I think he's addressed those and done a good job with that."

Jones came back the next week against Washington State and had one of the biggest plays of the game in CU's lone win. His 84-yard touchdown run late in the fourth quarter pulled CU within 31-28, and the Buffs went on to win the game, 35-34.

Against UCLA on Sept. 29, Jones got more of an opportunity to run the ball after Powell injured his ankle in the first half. Powell's status for Thursday's game against Arizona State is up on the air, but if he's healthy, he's sure to start.

Where does that leave Jones? Hopefully still playing a significant role, he said.

"(Offensive coordinator Eric) Bieniemy always told me, everybody is interchangeable," Jones said. "You've just got to be able to do a lot of things, not just wanting to be in the backfield running the ball. You just have to be ready for anything that they throw at you."

Against UCLA, Jones actually lined up as a wide receiver in certain sets. While that's not something the Buffs plan to do often, Embree said having Jones, or maybe even D.D. Goodson, line up outside and give the Buffs some speed could be beneficial.

"He runs good routes, he has good natural hands," Embree said of Jones. "He doesn't flinch when the ball comes at him."

Jones could also be a major factor for CU catching passes out of the backfield. On Tuesday, Embree said CU is "not getting what we need out of the screen game."

A year ago, screen passes were a big part of CU's offense. Part of that, Embree said, was that quarterback Tyler Hansen and running back Rodney Stewart had a great connection and knew how to help each other on those plays. With Hansen and Stewart gone this year, the Buffs have missed that connection.

"We're not quite in sync like that at times," Embree said. "Sometimes it's the quarterback, sometimes it's the back, sometimes it's the line, but we work it every day. It's something we'll continue to emphasize and eventually it'll pay off."

As a backup to Stewart in 2011, Jones had 27 catches. In a limited role this year, Jones has 12 catches, ranking third on the team. Embree said Jones and Malcolm Creer could play a big role in CU getting the screen game going.

Jones also figures to be a nice complement to Powell in the backfield as CU looks ahead to the next seven games.

His current role isn't the role he envisioned coming into the year, but Jones is willing to do what he can to help the Buffs get the offense rolling.

"Of course. Whatever they want me to do, I'm going to get out there and just try to make it happen," Jones said. "I'm just trying to win some games, man."

"You always have to make the most of the opportunities that's been given to you. That's what I'm trying to do."

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Thorburn: CU Buffs welcome Ray Polk's return to secondary

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

They rewind the film over and over again.

Unfortunately for the Buffs, they can't go back and change the results.

Still, Colorado's coaches and players can't help but wonder how the first five games of the season might have been different with Ray Polk in the lineup.

How important is the fifth-year senior free safety to this team?

Even though he was lost due to a painful ankle injury early in the Sept. 1 opener against Colorado State, Polk has been named a team captain in four games this season.

"When he went down in the CSU game, I know in my heart if he would have been in there, their two touchdowns don't happen just because of the communication issue," CU head coach Jon Embree said during his Tuesday press luncheon. "That's how big it is having someone like Ray Polk back."

Perhaps if the Polk-led CU defense holds off the Rams -- who rallied in the second half to beat the Buffs 22-17 at Sports Authority Field in Denver -- the team plays with much more confidence in the home opener against Sacramento State.

Instead, the FCS Hornets took advantage of the wide-eyed and out-of-sync secondary as Garrett Saffron passed for 312 yards and two touchdowns. A pass interference call against freshman cornerback Kenneth Crawley and a clutch 11-yard completion by Saffron set up Edgar Castaneda's game-winning field goal at the buzzer.

A week later at Fresno State, communication problems and blown assignments allowed the Bulldogs to score touchdowns of 97, 94 and 60 yards en route to a 69-14 romp.

Polk watched helplessly as the unthinkable unfolded and CU fell to 0-3 against a seemingly favorable non-conference schedule.

"It's been hard. It's been a hard season," Polk said. "You get what life hands you. It's unfortunate, but there's nowhere to go but put your head down and keep working."

During the bye week, Polk worked hard to get healthy. He doesn't know for sure that he will be able to play in Thursday night's key home game against Arizona State, but for the first time since the injury there is a chance.

"I'm going to try to go, but if it's not ready I'm not going to be a liable risk for the team," Polk said before Tuesday's practice.

The Buffs (1-4, 1-1) are last in the Pac-12 in scoring defense (39.4 ppg), last in passing defense (308.8 ypg), and 11th in total defense (474.4 ypg).

Defensive coordinator Greg Brown, who should also be getting linebacker Doug Rippey back, needs all hands on deck as CU prepares for a daunting October that also includes road games at USC and Oregon.

Matt Barkley threw for a Trojan-record six touchdown passes against last year's injury-depleted CU secondary.

The Ducks beat the Buffs 45-2 in Boulder without their starting quarterback or running back even suiting up.

"We're waiting with open arms for Ray Polk to return, whenever that may be," Brown said. "It's kind of reminiscent in a way of when Anthony Perkins came back from his ankle after missing six games and was able to play against Utah in his last game."

With Perkins and Polk finally working in tandem, the Buffs were able to win a 17-14 defensive struggle in Salt Lake City in the 2011 finale to end the program's 24-game road losing streak.

"The thing that was striking about that game, besides getting Anthony back, was it was the first time since the second game against Cal that we had our five original starters all together," Brown recalled. "It helped. We were able to call some things in that game that we had not been able to call up until that time because these guys were able to handle it.

"There was more maturity in that group and more cohesiveness. It certainly helped play a part in that victory that day."

Polk's presence would certainly help Crawley, Marques Mosley and Yuri Wright on Thursday when they take the ESPN prime-time stage for the first time.

With sophomore cornerback Greg Henderson back from his injury, and Parker Orms and Terrel Smith feeling confident about their recent big-play contributions at the safety positions, suddenly Brown has some intriguing pieces to work with.

He'll need them against the Pac-12 South Division-leading Sun Devils, who are averaging 38.4 points and 456.2 yards during a 4-1 start.

"For freshmen to come into a program and be able to get significant playing time is huge. I think right now they're doing a great job of handling it and by the time they are done they're going to be great football players," Polk said of his understudies. "The two biggest things they need to work on are individual assignments and just actually talking out there, knowing who's got what and understanding where your help is."

Help (Polk) might be on the way.

Follow Ryan on Twitter @RyanThorburn

Football: CU Buffs looking for better play at home

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

Posted:

Buffzone.com

An overnight home where the buffalo roam?

During his weekly press luncheon on Tuesday in the Glenn Miller Ballroom on the Colorado campus, Jon Embree joked about making the Buffs sleep with Ralphie at Folsom Field if it would help them realize the importance of protecting their home field.

The Buffs (1-4, 1-1) -- who host Pac-12 South Division-leading Arizona State (4-1, 2-0) on Thursday night (7 p.m., ESPN) -- are still searching for their first home win of the season.

CU is 1-6 at Folsom Field under Embree.

"I know basketball coaches do stuff where they spend the night in the gym to quote, 'protect the house,' " Embree said. "I don't think I could get away with that, sleeping under Ralphie. That might be the last straw."

Last season Embree talked a lot about ending CU's road losing streak. The Buffs were able to put the 24-game skid to bed with a 17-14 win at Utah on Nov. 25, 2011.

In the Pac-12 opener on Sept. 22, CU stunned Washington State in Pullman.

"It's all about winning. I emphasized winning on the road last year. This year I didn't really say anything to the team about going and winning on the road and we're 1-1," Embree said. "There's nothing worse than losing at home and then you go home and don't want to do nothing."

The last time CU hosted a Thursday night ESPN game was in 2008 when the program upset No. 21 West Virginia 17-14 in overtime.

"I feel like it has everything to do with attitude, has everything to do with pride, has everything to do with effort and what it means to you," linebacker Derrick Webb said of turning things around at Folsom Field. "Our first home win is critical."

Buff Madness

CU women's basketball coach Linda Lappe and men's point guard Spencer Dinwiddie encouraged the fans in attendance at the UMC to come out and watch Friday's "Buff Madness" event at the Coors Events Center.

After CU's volleyball match against Arizona State, the basketball teams will take the court to participate in contests and scrimmages.

"I just think it's going to be a great interactive experience for (the fans) to get to know us a little bit," Dinwiddie said.

The confident sophomore was asked what would happen if he played one-on-one against Embree.

"I don't think he wants that problem," Dinwiddie said.

Embree, a Cherry Creek High School standout back in the day, used to play in pick-up games with Tad Boyle

before they became head coaches.

"Back in my day fouls were a little bit different than they are now," Embree retorted to Dinwiddie. "So if I got unlimited fouls, we'll go out there and mess around a little bit."

Between the first and second quarter of Thursday's game at Folsom Field, Pac-12 commissioner Larry Scott will present the 2011-12 Buffs with their championship rings for winning the conference tournament in March.

Top Devils

Arizona State is second in the Pac-12 in scoring offense (38.4 ppg) and first in scoring defense (13.6 ppg). Ten different players have run the ball and 12 different players have caught passes for the Sun Devils.

Embree said D.J. Foster is the player his defense needs to be most aware of when the game is on the line.

"Their go-to guy is D.J. Foster," Embree said. "When they really need a play, that's the guy they look at."

Foster leads Arizona State in rushing at 41.4 yards per game and is third in receiving (45.2 ypg).

Defensively, Embree continues to rave about Arizona State defensive tackle Will Sutton, who already has 10 tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks.

"The thing I like about him is he plays the run with as much passion as he does the passing game," Embree said. "That's rare."

Training room

The Buffs took advantage of the bye week physically. The team is as healthy as it has been since the opener against Colorado State.

Players listed as day-to-day on the injury report include center Brad Cotner (toe), free safety Ray Polk (ankle), tailback Christian Powell (quadriceps) and defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe (ankle).

Players listed as probable include center Gus Handler (ankle), linebacker Jon Major (quadriceps) and linebacker Doug Rippy.

Notable

This will be the seventh non-Saturday game in the history of Folsom Field; the Buffs are 3-3 in the previous six. ... CU is 2-0 on Thursday night games at Folsom Field with the win over West Virginia four years ago and a 21-17 victory over Stanford on Sept. 6, 1990, which proved to be crucial en route to the program's only national title. ... Arizona State leads the series 3-0, including last year's 48-14 victory over CU in Tempe.

Football: CU Buffs' Embree pleased with attitude change

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Buffzone.com

Following a 48-14 loss to Arizona State in Tempe, Ariz., on Oct. 29, 2011, Colorado head coach Jon Embree called out his troops.

"We have some people who are comfortable with the results, that's just the facts," he said after that loss. "We are comfortable at times with what happens. So I am trying to create a culture and environment where that isn't the case."

Nearly a year later, Embree is pleased with the change in that regard. CU (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12) will host Arizona State (4-1, 2-0) on Thursday night. During his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Embree said that while the disappointing results are still coming, the attitude toward those results is different.

"Yes it is better. Significantly better," he said. "Guys are competing, they care about what happens, there's pride, there's a lot of fight in them. It has changed that aspect of it."

Embree is hoping to see a lot of pride and fight on Thursday night against the high-flying Sun Devils. First-year coach Todd Graham has the Sun Devils averaging 38.4 points and 456.2 yards per game.

CU is coming off a bye week, but so is Arizona State, so both teams ought to be rested. Embree is hopeful the bye week will recharge his Buffs.

"It's been good," he said. "It's allowed us to get some guys back healthy, allowed us to address a few issues - tackling and turnovers."

Better tackling and creating turnovers were major points of emphasis over the past week and a half, he said.

"We did a lot of live tackling," he said. "To the players, it may not have felt like a bye, because we had a lot of live periods within practice, but it was good to do that. "

Notable

CU is 2-0 all-time in Thursday night games at Folsom Field. The Buffs defeated Stanford 21-17 in 1990 and West Virginia 17-14 in overtime in 2008. Embree is optimistic that safety Ray Polk (ankle) will return to the field this week. Polk was injured in the season opener on Sept. 1 and has not played since. ... The health status of CU's injured players won't be known until after practice on Tuesday, but Embree is hoping a full squad will be available against the Sun Devils. ... Embree said the Buffs will not have any recruits in for this weekend, but they will have some in for every other weekend after this one. ... In advance of Friday night's Buffs Madness basketball event, point guard Spencer Dinwiddie of the men's team and head coach Linda Lappe of the women's team both took a few minutes to address the media and fans at Tuesday's press conference at the University Memorial Center. The event starts at approximately 8:30 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Thursday night's game crucial to Colorado's rebuilding efforts?

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado has been a frequent participant in nationally televised games, but Thursday night on ESPN is different. It's the big stage, with little competition for the college football audience.

The Buffaloes (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12) are considered as much as a 23-point underdog to Arizona State (4-1, 2-0) in the Pac-12 battle at Folsom Field. A CU victory would be a huge surprise.

But CU players and coaches say it would benefit the program greatly if a young Buffs squad put on a good show.

"This game is huge — for recruiting, for exposure, a lot of things," CU senior safety Ray Polk said Tuesday.

Polk could have added that a competitive effort by the Buffs might also give a boost to the school's fundraising efforts as well. Polk and others said it is important for Colorado to show signs that it is making strides in its rebuilding effort.

"It's really prime time," junior linebacker Derrick Webb said. "It's a time to lay it all out and show everyone what your team and what the program is all about. It's just a great opportunity. It's a Thursday night game. Everyone is going to be watching. It's a big game for Colorado, period. We're all very excited. A game like this is the reason we play college football."

Not to downplay the excitement of performing under the bright lights, but second-year Colorado coach Jon Embree reminded those at his Tuesday weekly media luncheon that every game has the potential to reach a huge audience.

"With the way things are now, with the Pac-12 Network and other things, a lot of recruits watch us play," Embree said. "This is important because it's an opportunity to go 2-1 (in conference play), it's an important game because it's the next game, it's an important game because it's a home game, and we need to win at home. ...

"That it's Thursday night on ESPN doesn't make it any bigger than it already is. It just happens to be on national television. That's our approach and we'll never change that."

As for recruiting implications, Embree said the fact that Colorado is in a rebuilding mode and needs an infusion of talent supersedes what happens on the field during one game.

"Kids will get to see us play, but when it comes to recruiting, a lot of times it comes down to opportunity," Embree said. "That's the No. 1 thing kids are looking for. They see that obviously I'm not afraid to play freshmen. If a freshman is the best guy, I'm going to play him."

Adam Munsterteiger, publisher of Rivals.com's locally based BuffStampede.com, said the recruiting ramifications of a national telecast, and especially a Thursday night game on ESPN with most college football fans tuning in, may not be known for a few years.

"When a team plays well in a game like this, it doesn't always help immediately in recruiting," Munsterteiger said. "But some 15-year-old watching TV somewhere might be seeing Colorado for the first time, and it could plant a seed."

Munsterteiger, who has covered CU recruiting for 10 years, said it's been his observation that the performance of a team in a nationally televised game often does impact a recruit's decision making.

"It's interesting, because when a recruit is making a visit to a campus and the team doesn't play well, that's usually not that big a deal because the prospect takes in the whole atmosphere," Munsterteiger explained. "But what we've seen is that when a recruit is just watching a team on TV, he's more likely to cross it off his list if it gets blown out."

CU offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy returned to his alma mater with Embree after coaching Minnesota Vikings running backs for five years. Bieniemy compared Thursday nights for the college game to the NFL's Monday Night Football.

"It's always special when the eye in the sky is directly pointed at you," Bieniemy said. "It's a great opportunity for our players. It's a great opportunity for our fans. It's great exposure for our program."

"Now it's up to us to make the most of this opportunity."

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CU Buffs' Jon Embree says protecting home turf crucial with ASU next

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado won the two previous Thursday night home games in its football history — 1990 over Stanford and 2008 over West Virginia — and hopes to make it three straight this week against visiting Arizona State.

But beyond keeping that mini streak intact, defending the home territory is crucial to CU's rebuilding efforts, Buffs coach Jon Embree said Tuesday during his weekly media luncheon. Colorado (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12) is looking for its first Folsom Field victory of the season, having lost 30-28 to Sacramento State and 42-14 to UCLA.

Last fall, Colorado went 1-4 at home in the first year under Embree and CU's debut in the Pac-12 Conference. The lone home win came against an Arizona team that had fired its head coach weeks earlier.

Arizona State (4-1, 2-0) has been made as much as a 23-point favorite for Thursday night.

"I've never been around anything like this in my life, as a player or as a coach," Embree said of CU's struggles at home. "It is something we'll talk about. It's something we'll talk about tonight when I address the team about where our mindset needs to be."

Embree, who played tight end for the Buffs in the 1980s, pointed out that offseason conditioning included players running the steps and doing other drills at Folsom Field while talking about protecting the home turf.

"For whatever reason, that hasn't worked," Embree said. "I know basketball coaches (address defending the home court) by having their team spend the night in the gym. But I don't think I could get away with that, sleeping out there on Ralphie."

It's about pride and satisfaction, Embree said.

"I just know what my mindset was as a player and a coach," he said. "When you're playing on the road, the best sound was silence (in the stands). You're singing our fight song (after a victory), and it's quiet.

"Being at home, it's about the place being deafening. You want it so you can't hear yourself talk to your teammate. The bottom line, the common denominator, was winning."

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Posted on Wed, Oct. 10, 2012

Arizona State (4-1) at Colorado (1-4) (ET)

By Sports Network
The Sports Network

FACTS & STATS: Site: Folsom Field (53,613) -- Boulder, Colorado. Television: ESPN. Home Record: Arizona State 3-0, Colorado 0-2 Away Record: Arizona State 1-1, Colorado 1-2. Neutral Record: Arizona State 0-0, Colorado 0-0. Conference Record: Arizona State 2-0, Colorado 1-1. Series Record: Arizona State leads 3-0.

GAME NOTES: Coming off a bye week, the Arizona State Sun Devils will look to keep their perfect conference record clean when they travel to Folsom Field to take on the Colorado Buffaloes in a Pac-12 matchup on Thursday night.

The Sun Devils won back-to-back games, both in conference play, before the recent bye week to improve to 2-0 in the Pac-12 and 4-1 overall. Last season Arizona State opened the season at 5-1 before stumbling down the stretch to a 6-7 overall mark. The squad's most recent victory was a 27-17 win over California which was the only win on the road for the Sun Devils this season.

Colorado was on the wrong end of a 42-14 thrashing at home to UCLA last time out. The Buffaloes had beaten Washington State (35-34) in the previous game, snapping a three-game slide that began the season. Colorado has yet to win at home in 2012 and is 8-11 over the last four seasons at Folsom Field.

These teams have met only three times, with all three matchups occurring since 2006. Arizona State has won all three contests, including a 48-14 rout last season.

Arizona State has been an offensive squad that is capable of piling up both points and yards at a high rate. The Sun Devils have scored 37 or more points in three different games this season and is currently ranked second in the Pac-12 at 38.4 ppg. The squad's total offensive output has been a bit less prolific, ranking fifth in the conference at 456.2 yards per game, but nonetheless has been effective.

Taylor Kelly has been impressive in his first season running Todd Graham's offensive system and has the numbers to prove it. Kelly has throw for 1,292 yards while completing 67.6 percent of his passes. Most importantly he has limited turnovers by throwing only two interceptions to go with his nine touchdown passes. He is coming off perhaps one of his best games this season when he threw for 292 yards and three touchdowns against California.

Kelly has built a nice rapport with tight end Chris Coyle who leads the team in receptions (26) and yards (338), while pulling in a pair of touchdown receptions. Explosive return man Jamal Miles has factored into the passing game as well with 14 receptions for 179 yards.

Last season Cameron Marshall rushed for over 1,000 yards but the senior running back has struggled this season, averaging only 3.3 yards per carry. Marshall looked a bit more in form against California as he rushed for a season-high 69 yards. Marion Grice (206 yards) and D.J. Foster (208) have also gotten a good amount of work while producing at a higher rate than Marshall.

More impressive than the offense has been Arizona State's ability to slow down other teams with its defense. The Sun Devils are ranked first in the Pac-12 in scoring defense (13.6 ppg) and total defense (276.2 ypg). They have excelled getting upfield, with a Pac-12 leading 50 tackles for loss.

Will Sutton (34 tackles, 10 TFL, 6.5 sacks), Chris Young (36 tackles, 9.5 TFL) and Carl Bradford (28 tackles, 7.5 TFL, 4.5 sacks) have been at the forefront of the defensive's strength.

As its 1-4 record might indicate, Colorado has not been a very efficient offense this season. The Buffaloes are averaging 340.8 yards of total offense per game, while ranking last in the Pac-12 in scoring 21.6 ppg. That inability to consistently score has stemmed from a failure to create scoring opportunities. The Buffaloes are last in the Pac-12 in red zone attempts this season.

Jordan Webb has shown flashes of brilliance at quarterback this season, even earning a Pac-12 offensive Player of the Week honor. His numbers do not jump off the page as he has completed just 58.6 percent of his pass attempts for 961 yards, seven touchdowns and four interceptions.

The receiving tandem of Nelson Spruce and Tyler McCulloch have been the most frequent targets of Webb's passes this season. Spruce leads the team in receptions (24) and yards (260), while McCulloch has added 19 receptions for 238 yards. Each has also caught a pair of touchdown passes.

Christian Powell and Tony Jones have shared the bulk of the responsibility in the running game. Powell leads the way with 310 yards on a team-high 69 carries, while Jones has shown a more explosive streak, averaging 6.0 yards per carry, including an 84-yard touchdown run earlier this season.

While the offense has struggled to score, Buffalo opponents have had no such issues. Colorado has been the worst scoring defense in the Pac-12 this season (39.4 ppg) and is better than only one other squad (Arizona) in total defense (474. ypg).

With teams often getting big plays down the field a pair of defensive backs have led the team in tackles with Kenneth Crawley and Terrel Smith each collecting 40 stops this season. Chidera Uzo-Dirirbe has been effective up front racking up a team-high 5.5 sacks.

It was not expected that Todd Graham would transform Arizona State into such a strong defensive team in his first season. Thus far the Sun Devils have been able to control the tempo, while getting effective play from the offense. Colorado on other hand has had no such balance.

Sports Network Predicted Outcome: Arizona State 34, Colorado 10

Game Date and Time

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