



*CU coach Jon Embree can cite numerous reasons for ASU's visit being important.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com*



Brooks: Buffs Hoping To Shine In ESPN Prime Time

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

BOULDER - ESPN has settled at Folsom Field for Thursday night football and Colorado coach Jon Embree - citing all the right reasons - knows what that means for his Buffaloes.

Some of his players' views might differ, but Embree is not going overboard with the "nation-is-watching" angle, other than conceding that, well, the nation should know that he's not opposed to playing freshmen. Lots of them. Embree has employed 21 freshmen - 13 of the first-year variety - in the first five games.

So revitalized Arizona State will see bunches of young Buffs Thursday night, which can be good/bad news for a CU team seeking to make October nothing like September.

Embree sees any game on national TV as "good so that kids out there can see how we play," obviously hoping his team plays to (or beyond) its capabilities. "When it comes to recruiting, a lot of kids are looking for opportunity. That's really the number one thing they are looking for. As you've seen, I'm not afraid to play freshman. If they are the best guy, they are going to play."

But aside from showcasing recruiting strategies/needs, there are plenty of other reasons this game lines up in

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the large category. Let Embree count them: "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. It's an important game because it gives us an opportunity to get to 2-1 in the (Pac-12) South. It just happens to be on national television. That's our approach to it and we will never change that. I think all of those factors override the fact that it is a Thursday night ESPN game."

What goes without him or anyone saying is the Buffs need a win - especially at Folsom, where, let's face it, they're not so fearsome anymore. Their only two home appearances this season have resulted in losses to Sacramento State (30-28) and UCLA (42-14). Winning at home, said junior linebacker Derrick Webb, "has everything to do with attitude, everything to do with pride and effort and what it means to you. When we play at home, we're playing to win, of course, but you've got everyone here in Colorado, all the Buff Nation, everyone who comes out to see you win games at home.

"So far we haven't been able to get a win at home. Our first home win is very critical; it means a lot to me because the seniors on our team only have so many home games left, so many more opportunities to run behind Ralphie . . . home games are very special. For us to come out and beat ASU in a prime time game, that would be huge lift for our season."

Junior quarterback Jordan Webb has only two games at Folsom on his CU resume, but he knows what a home advantage means and what must be done to fashion one.

"It's huge to be able to have home advantage whenever somebody comes into town," he said. "That starts with us winning and people getting behind us. We're expecting a great crowd. We're lucky to play in a great stadium with a good bunch of fans. We're always kind of expecting that - but especially on a Thursday night with ESPN being there. It should be a pretty good atmosphere."

It will be CU's annual "blackout" night, with Buffs fans outfitted in black and their team sporting all-black uniforms. CU also has this on its side: The Buffs are 2-0 in Thursday night ESPN games. But here's your reality check: They're 0-3 against the Sun Devils and three-touchdown underdogs in meeting No. 4.

"J-Webb," a summer transfer from Kansas, is like most college football players who are drawn to their TVs on Thursday night. "I try," he said. "It's always cool to watch. And everybody is watching the same game. So it's something to text your buddies about and kind of talk about the next day."

Added "D-Webb:" "Games like this, it's every reason why we come to play college football . . . it's really prime time. It's time to lay it all out and show everyone your team and what your program is all about. It's just a great opportunity. It's a Thursday night game and everyone is going to be watching. It's a big game for Colorado. Period."

The Buffs' lone win came three weekends ago at Washington State, somewhat of a curiosity given it was only the program's second road win in the past 26 out-of-state trips. That win and the following week's lopsided loss against UCLA put CU at 1-1 in the Pac-12 South and 1-4 overall. At 2-0, ASU (4-1 overall) leads the division, followed by Southern California (2-1), then CU. Trailing are UCLA (1-2), Arizona (0-3) and Utah (0-2).

"We need to come out of this one on top . . . we understand the significance of it," said senior safety Ray Polk, who hopes to return Thursday night after missing the past four games with a high ankle sprain. "We win this game and we're tied for first in the Pac-12 (South). It's huge. Regardless of what the preseason handed us, this is a huge game for us in this program. And they're a great team. So we've got to be ready for them."

Polk is an Arizona native (Phoenix) and has at least one friend on the ASU roster. But none of that matters to Polk: "It's a game we need to win - that's it."

The Sun Devils are first in the Pac-12 in total defense, allowing only 276.2 yards a game. The Buffs are averaging 341.8 yards in total offense and they'll probably need to hit at least that to stay in stride with the high-scoring Sun Devils (38.4 points a game).

ASU yields a league-best 13.6 points a game and is second in the league in quarterback sacks with 21 - not such good news for Jordan Webb, who has been sacked that many times. CU's 22 sacks allowed are second only to California's 29 as the worst in the league. "They're very aggressive; they count on getting pressure on the quarterback (and) they've done a good job of that this year," Jordan Webb said of the Sun Devils' pass rush.

But, he added, "Our offensive line is prepared. We've got some schemes in that will help us. I have faith in our offensive line, I have every game. I think we'll continue to improve. I think getting hit, a lot of that is on my back too, so I have to get rid of the ball quicker."

Embree said ASU's defense is unpredictable in that its blitzes "come from all different angles; they blitz in different parts of the field. There's no set tendencies with them. We have to be good with our protections and our tempo. And when we run the ball we have to do a good job of getting on the right guys."

Another statistical contrast comes in turnover margin. ASU is second in the Pac-12 at plus-4, CU is second to last at minus-4. For the Buffs to finally win at Folsom, those numbers can't hold. Jordan Webb, who has thrown four interceptions and seven touchdown passes, said QB coach Rip Scherer has emphasized ball security. Said the CU starter: "It comes down to being smart with the ball for me - tucking it with both hands if there's a pass rush on top of me. Other than that, it's just about being smart."

Despite ESPN's presence and the number of other implications for the Buffs, Jordan Webb said he and his teammates will try to "to treat it as any other game and come out and execute our game plan as best as possible. We have a good opponent so we need to play to the best of our ability. You want to be hyped up before a football game, obviously, but you don't want guys thinking it's too big a stage . . . it's really not. It's just another game, but luckily for us it will be nationally televised so that will be cool."

Or not so cool if . . . the Buffs aren't considering that nasty possibility.

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SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs must prove themselves in front of national audience

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The most important game of the football season for the Colorado Buffaloes is Thursday night at Folsom Field.

It wasn't that way when the season started and wouldn't be the case had the Buffs not fallen on their faces in September against the likes of Colorado State, Sacramento State and Fresno State. But those losses created an impression of CU football and where things stand in coach Jon Embree's rebuilding project in Boulder.

While Embree's team will play on national television for much of the remainder of the season, it won't play another game in which the rest of the college football world and its future recruits are all watching (7 p.m., ESPN).

This is the Buffs' best opportunity to change some of those opinions formed after September flops. CU doesn't necessarily have to win, but it must avoid being embarrassed.

Yes, this is what it has come to around here.

And avoiding further ridicule won't be easy.

Arizona State has played its first five games like a bona fide Pac-12 title contender. This week coach Todd Graham said he believes his team is basically one play -- at Missouri -- away from being 5-0. ASU might have a hard time beating Oregon -- we'll find out next week -- but it certainly appears capable of winning the South Division.

The Sun Devils are scoring 38 points a game while stifling opposing offenses with the 10th ranked defense in the nation. And unlike the Buffs, all but one of the Sun Devils' opponents have been BCS conference teams.

Embree didn't take the bait this week when asked about the significance of playing in front of the nation -- aside from the political junkies who might be watching the vice presidential debate and its aftermath. Embree insists tonight's game isn't any more important than the others on the schedule.

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

Students have organized a blackout and the home team will wear those popular black helmets. So how do the 1-4 Buffs allow their fans to storm the field at the end of the night to celebrate the first win at home this season?

They will have to have success in at least three areas where they've enjoyed little of it this season.

Run the football -- The Buffs are 104th in the nation on the ground but use an offense that often relies on play-action passing and hoping the defense is concerned about the running game. Success on the ground gives the defense time to rest and it will need to considering the Sun Devils have 20 scoring drives this season that took 3 minutes or less.

Get some turnovers -- CU has forced just seven turnovers in its five games and has given it up 11 times. The numbers are exactly opposite for the Sun Devils, who already have eight interceptions this season.

Make big plays in the kicking game -- The Buffs have been mediocre in some areas of special teams and just plain bad in others, such as kickoff return where they're 116th in the nation, allowing 28 yards per return. This is a team that plays at altitude and should have no problem kicking the ball deep into the end zone if not out the backside.

Success in all three areas won't guarantee victory, but it would give CU a much better chance.

A raucous crowd and plenty of emotion also would help. The Buffs need all the help they can get because they haven't shown they have the talent to go head-to-head with the best in the conference. They're coming off a 42-14 loss to UCLA 12 days ago and allowed at least 40 points and 500 yards of total offense to five straight Pac-12 opponents at one point last season.

Graham said he expects CU to have an extra bounce in its step playing a high-profile game at home with several key veterans returning from injury. Senior linebacker Doug Rippy is expected to play for the first time since Week 2 and center Gus Handler will be back for the first time in three weeks.

Senior safety Ray Polk is likely a game-time decision nearly six weeks after suffering a severe high-ankle sprain in the season opener. "You're going into someone else's place," Graham told his team this week. "You have to be the most passionate and disciplined team on the field. No one is just going to lie down for you."

While Embree took the "just another game" approach this week, it was clear some of his players couldn't help themselves. Linebacker Derrick Webb sees Thursday's game as more than just the next one on the schedule.

"It's a time to lay it all out and show everyone what your team and what the program is all about," Webb said. "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."

Thorburn: Former CU Buff John Wooten getting his due

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Jon Embree sees the name every day at work.

Colorado's head coach could have picked any of the legendary names associated with the program -- Byron White, Joe Romig, Cliff Branch, Bill McCartney -- to mark his parking spot near the Dal Ward Center.

Embree chose John Wooten.

Thursday night, nearly 54 years after playing his final snap at CU, Wooten's name will once again echo through the Folsom Field loudspeakers.

Wooten, a first-team All-American offensive guard for the Buffs in 1958, will be honored by his alma mater and the National Football Foundation at halftime of CU's game against Arizona State.

On Dec. 4, one day before his 76th birthday, Wooten will be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in New York.

In the fall of 1955, Wooten became the second black player to play at CU, arriving from Carlsbad, N.M., a year after Frank Clarke broke the color barrier in Boulder.

"John Wooten is special to me," Embree said. "Obviously, what he did allowed opportunities for more African-American players to come to Colorado, to have success, to have opportunities. ... He's a man of great heart, character and integrity. It couldn't happen to a better person. I was surprised he hadn't already been in there."

Wooten's first varsity game was one to forget as the Buffs opened the 1956 campaign with a 35-0 home loss to Oregon.

But with Wooten providing what the late CU historian Fred Casotti described as "bone-crunching lead blocks" to open up holes in coach Dal Ward's vintage Single-wing and Wing-T formations, quarterback Boyd Dowler, fullback John Bayuk and halfback Bob Stransky led CU to seven wins and a tie over the next nine regular-season games.

The only other loss was to No. 1 Oklahoma, which rallied for 21 second-half points to beat the Buffs 27-19. However, CU's consolation prize was a sweet one -- a bid to the Orange Bowl. The Buffs made history with the program's first postseason victory, a 27-21 triumph over Clemson.

The more significant story was Clarke and Wooten bravely taking the field in front of 72,552 fans in the deep South with the support of their white CU teammates.

Leading up to the game, the Tigers stated that they didn't want to play the Big Seven representatives if they used black players.

Actually, that's not exactly how they phrased it.

"When Clemson said they wouldn't play us, it was the wording that got to us," Bayuk said in a 'Classic CU' article written by iconic Buffs radio voice Larry Zimmer. "They said, 'We're not going to play with those monkeys.'"

The staff at the Bal Harbor Hotel in Miami wanted Clarke and Wooten to room together on the top floor and use the back entrance.

The Buffs did it their way.

"Miami Beach was still segregated and the hotel personnel plainly stated they didn't want any Negroes coming down there," Wooten told Zimmer in the archived piece on the CU athletic department website. "We stood strong. When we went to Miami Beach, we had our usual roommates, and it was business as usual. And Clemson did show up at the game and we beat them."

During the 1957 season, CU led the nation in rushing (322.4 ypg) and was second in total offense (415.2 ypg).

In 1958, the Buffs were 5-0 and ranked No. 9 in the polls (the program's first appearance in the top 10) after a 27-16 victory over Nebraska.

But Wooten's dream of a senior season was interrupted with a rude awakening as CU lost to Oklahoma, Missouri, Colorado State and Air Force down the stretch.

Wooten was drafted by Cleveland in 1959 and became a dominant pulling guard for Jim Brown. After nine seasons with the Browns, he finished his playing career with the Washington Redskins in 1968.

Seven years after hanging up the cleats, Wooten became the director of pro scouting with the Dallas Cowboys (1975-91). He also worked in the front offices of the Philadelphia Eagles and Baltimore Ravens until his retirement in 2002.

Wooten has continued to help change the face of the sport by serving as the chairman of the Fritz Pollard Alliance, which works in conjunction with the NFL as it relates to minority hiring for coaching, scouting and front office positions.

CU's first black head coach is well aware of the hardships Clarke, Wooten and other Buffs -- including Bill Harris, Teddy Woods, Ed Coleman, Noble Minton and Al Hollingsworth from the 1961 team, which experienced similar issues at the Orange Bowl -- had to endure.

Pulling in or out of that parking spot certainly puts the current struggle to rebuild the Buffs into perspective.

"When you're a pioneer and you have to go through stuff, you have to be a special person," Embree said. "Because you're going to get a lot of things thrown your way, a lot of things said to you. Especially during that time, you're going to be treated differently and you have to be strong enough as a man to be able to handle that."

As they drive away from Folsom Field after Thursday's game, hopefully a lot more people will remember the name John Wooten.

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

Colorado wary of ASU's penchant for racking up turnovers

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Unless fortunes improve dramatically during the second half of the season, Colorado likely won't be favored in any of its remaining football games. That includes Thursday (7 p.m., ESPN) against visiting Arizona State, which will enter Folsom Field as more than a three-touchdown favorite.

To pull an upset, the Buffaloes (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12) need some help. That means winning the turnover battle.

"We have to get them," said CU senior linebacker Doug Rippy.

Trouble is, recent trends aren't on Colorado's side, especially in this matchup.

CU ranks 11th among Pac-12 teams in turnover margin (minus-four), ahead of only Washington State (minus-five). Meanwhile, Arizona State (4-1, 2-0) is second in the conference in turnover margin (plus-four), trailing only Stanford (plus-five). ASU sophomore quarterback Taylor Kelly has thrown only two interceptions in 136 pass attempts.

Defensively, Colorado ranks last in the league in "takeaways" with a total of just seven through five games: three interceptions and four fumbles recovered. Only Utah has made fewer interceptions than the Buffs thus far, with two picks. On offense, Colorado has lost five fumbles and thrown six interceptions for a total of 11 "giveaways."

The Buffs must reverse the negative ratio of turnovers made to turnovers lost, CU coach Jon Embree said. The team devoted a significant portion of the bye week working on drills that, the coaching staff hopes, will lead to the Buffs forcing turnovers.

Even 7-on-7 work was "live" with full contact. That's unusual, especially after the season begins.

"We did that just so players are aware (of turnovers)," Embree said. "Fumbling is not something kids do on purpose. They're trying to make plays. But we have to do a better job of understanding that, when you have the football, what that means."

When the first-team CU offense worked against the scout-team defense, coaches instructed the scout-teamers to go for the ball. Conversely, when the first-team defense went against the scout-team offense, the emphasis was on creating takeaways.

"I know in practice that players look at me like I'm crazy, but I get mad when a guy misses an interception," Embree said. "You have to do it in practice if you're going to do it in a game."

Rippy believes the drills will help.

"Some guys just have a knack for getting interceptions and fumbles," Rippy said. "But you can improve that."

The concern Thursday night for Colorado's offense is getting careless and reckless against an Arizona State defense that attempts to apply pressure on every play. First-year Sun Devils coach Todd Graham is known for his explosive spread offenses. But defensively, ASU blitzes from as many different spots and angles as any team in the Pac-12.

Junior defensive tackle Will Sutton (6-foot-1, 267 pounds) is exceptionally active for an interior lineman and has 6½ sacks. His push from the middle allows the defensive ends, Carl Bradford (6-1, 233) and Mullen product Junior Onyeali (6-0, 233), more room to make plays. Bradford has 4½ sacks and Onyeali has four.

"There's no set tendencies," Embree said of when and where ASU's blitzes might originate.

Colorado junior quarterback Jordan Webb, who has thrown four interceptions and been sacked 21 times, said the Buffs' offense is well aware of the Sun Devils' attacking nature.

"They're very aggressive; they count on putting pressure on the quarterback," Webb said. "I think our offense is prepared. We've got some schemes that will help us."

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Availability of Colorado safety Ray Polk remains uncertain in ASU game

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Will he or won't he? The availability of Colorado senior free safety Ray Polk for Thursday night's home game against Arizona State remains a mystery.

Even Polk, out since suffering a high-ankle sprain during the Buffaloes' season opener against Colorado State in Denver, said he couldn't be certain whether he will be able to play.

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

CU coach Jon Embree said Polk "will be back this week," but cautioned there is a chance that Polk could be held out for a fifth consecutive game if the soreness "is acting up."

Senior linebacker Doug Rippy, who sat out the Buffs' past three games with a sprained knee, said he definitely will play against the Sun Devils.

Welcome home. Three Coloradans hold prominent spots on Arizona State's two-deep roster: starting right guard Andrew Sampson (a senior from Overland High School), starting defensive end Junior Onyeali (a junior from Mullen) and redshirt freshman Ezekial Bishop, a Denver East graduate who is listed as the Sun Devils' second-team free safety.

Also, third-team ASU defensive tackle Jake Sheffield graduated from Aurora's Gateway High School in 2005 before joining the military and then playing junior college football in the Los Angeles area.

Night moves. CU is 3-3 in night home games not played on a Saturday and has lost two straight: a 2011 Friday night game against Southern California and a 2009 Sunday night game against Colorado State. Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

OCTOBER 11, 2012, 9:19 AM

Colorado's Embree praises freshman safety Marques Mosley

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

BOULDER — One explanation for Colorado's inconsistent tackling and lack of takeaways is the youth in the secondary, CU coach Jon Embree said. But, he added, that doesn't have to be an excuse and it does not apply to at least one true freshman.

Embree praised the performance and effort of Marques Mosley, the 6-foot-1, 180-pound freshman safety from Upland, Calif. Colorado devoted extra time during the bye week on a drill whereby the first defender makes the tackle and another tries to strip the ballcarrier of the ball.

"Really, one of the best in that drill was Marques Mosley," Embree said. "The thing I love about that kid is his toughness and want-to. During a tackling drill, I come to find out his nose was bleeding. He didn't blink and kept going. Finally, I had to pull him out of the drill to get his nose fixed."

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/10/11/colorados-embree-praises-freshman-safety-marques-mosley/25324/>

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Colorado, Arizona State rested and ready after bye



ARNIE STAPLETON AP Sports Writer Published: October 10, 2012 4:01PM

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) -- The Colorado Buffaloes are coming off their first bye week since Jon Embree took over the program two years ago. It may not help.

Arizona State is also rested and rejuvenated after its own bye and the Sun Devils bring another dynamic offense to Folsom Field along with a pass rush that has been a nightmare for opposing quarterbacks.

The Sun Devils (4-1, 2-0 Pac-12) have three players ranked in the top 40 in the nation in sacks per game in junior tackle Will Sutton, sophomore linebacker Carl Bradford and junior defensive end Junior Onyeali. The three combined for six sacks in their 27-17 win over Cal on Sept. 29.

"That's a good combination to have when you're getting that inside pressure along with pressure from the edge," said Embree, whose Buffaloes (1-4, 1-1) host the Sun Devils on Thursday night. "They'll pressure. They'll bring their linebackers; they'll bring their corners, occasionally a safety blitz. They have all the different kinds of pressure."

Buff's quarterback Jordan Webb said, "I think the offensive line is really prepared. We've got some schemes that will help us. I think I have full faith in our offensive line. I have every game. I think we'll continue to improve. Getting hit, a lot of that is on my back too, I have to get rid of the ball quickly."

The game is on ESPN, giving the Buffs a potential recruiting boost -- or a chance to show a national audience just how far they've fallen since their heyday.

Colorado is 2-0 on Thursday night games at Folsom Field, having beaten Stanford in 1990 and West Virginia in 2008, but the Buffs are more than three-touchdown underdogs this week.

Arizona State is averaging 38.4 points per game with Taylor Kelly running new coach Todd Graham's up-tempo offense, and the Sun Devils' defense is superb despite a lack of depth at cornerback, leading the Pac-12 in scoring defense (13.6 points), total defense (276.2 yards) and tackles for loss (9.8 per game).

Not exactly the prescription for all that ails the Buffaloes, who got off to another disappointing start this season and are coming off a 42-14 loss to UCLA at home two weeks ago.

At least the Buffaloes caught a break this year: last season, they played 13 straight weekends.

"It's been good for us, we're excited to get some guys back healthy, allow us to address a few issues, tackling and turnovers," said Embree, who gave his players a Friday-Saturday furlough. "We did a lot live tackling. To the players it may not have felt like a bye, because we had a lot of live periods within practice and it was good to do that."

The Buffaloes could get a big boost if fifth-year free safety Ray Polk can return from an ankle injury he sustained in the opener, leading to an out-of-sync secondary that was burned time and again in the Buffs' 0-3 start in non-conference games.

"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," Embree said. "That's how big it is having someone like Ray Polk in the game."

The Buffs, who are giving up a league-high 39.4 points and 309 yards passing per game, also expect to get linebacker Doug Rippy back from a sprained knee.

The key for the Sun Devils is to not look ahead.

After playing the Buffaloes, the Sun Devils get No. 2 Oregon in another Thursday night game at home. Then comes UCLA, which has been in and out of the polls, followed by road games against 10th-ranked Oregon State and No. 11 USC.

Considering the Sun Devils lost six of their final seven games last season after a 5-1 start, this week's game is one they can't afford to look past.

"I have said this earlier in the year that coming back from adversity is hard; I think handling success is harder," Graham said. "I think you have to stay hungry, you have stay focused on what you are doing, you have to stay motivated on the opponent that is right in front of you, so those are the things we have talked about.

"I haven't gotten any sense that our guys are overlooking Colorado."

The Buffs are looking beyond this game in one sense-- "With recruiting and exposure, it's huge," Polk said.

"One of the reasons I came here is that I saw it as kind of a ground zero for a program, something you can build off of your hard work and the efforts of your teammates," Polk said. "It's kind of a challenge that we extend out to our recruits: Can you come to a place and know that you built something of your own instead of taking something that has been passed down? It's a program where you can build something and refurbish something to what it once was."

An upset of the Sun Devils would have immediate implications, too.

"Shoot, we win this game and we're tied for first in the Pac-12 South," Polk said. "It's huge regardless of what preseason handed us."

AP College Football Writer John Marshall contributed.

Reach out to AP Pro Football Writer Arnie Melendrez Stapleton on Twitter:
<http://twitter.com/arniestapleton>

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Devils focus on Buffs before tackling Ducks

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ARIZONA STATE AT COLORADO

When: Thursday, 6 p.m.

Where: Folsom Field, Boulder, Colo.

TV: ESPN (Rece Davis, Jesse Palmer, David Pollack)

Radio: KTAR 620 AM (Tim Healey, Jeff Van Raaphorst)



Ron Cheney-US PRESSWIRE

Jordan Webb has passed for 961 yards and seven touchdowns with four interceptions, but Colorado's quarterbacks have been sacked 22 times in five games.

THREE KEYS TO VICTORY

-- Stay focused. Coach Todd Graham has stressed the last week ASU's need to focus solely on Colorado -- and not Oregon. Fans are probably already looking ahead to the big blackout game with the Ducks at Sun Devil Stadium on Oct. 18, but the Sun Devils risk an upset if they do so.

-- Eliminate mistakes. Especially on the road, mistakes can prove costly. ASU showed that already this season against Missouri. Bad turnovers and special teams miscues could allow Colorado to hang around. ASU should be able to play mistake-free football team against a 1-4 team.

-- Start fast. The Sun Devils could put this game away early with a fast start on offense. Score enough in the first half and some players could get a little extra rest before ASU begins the toughest part of its schedule.

THREE QUICK FACTS

-- This is only the fourth meeting between the Sun Devils and Buffaloes. In the three previous meetings, ASU is undefeated and has won by an average of nearly 24 points. At home last year, ASU won 48-14.

-- Colorado's offense ranks last in the Pac-12 in scoring, at 21.6 points per game, and 10th in total offense, with 341.8 yards per game. ASU's scoring defense is the best in the conference, allowing just 13.6 points per game, and its total defense is also tops in the Pac-12, giving up 276.2 yards per game.

-- When Colorado junior quarterback Jordan Webb takes the field Thursday it will mark the first time this season ASU will have faced opponents' starting quarterbacks in consecutive games. After facing Northern Arizona starter Cory Grossert for one half in the season opener, ASU faced three straight backups due to various injuries before seeing Zach Maynard against Cal in its last game.

MLB	SF @ CIN 1:07 ET	STL @ WAS 4:07 ET	BAL @ NYY 7:37 ET	DET @ OAK 9:37 ET
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the national rankings last week, and a win on national TV could help them sneak in ahead of a big game against Oregon. But also at stake is ASU's standing heading into that. The Sun Devils don't appear to be overlooking Colorado, but an upset loss would be embarrassing.

Outlook: The numbers suggest this game could be over by the end of the first quarter. ASU's offense should have no trouble building a fast lead on the Buffs' shaky defense. But the wild card in all of it is the setting: Thursday night on the road. That seems to be a setting where anything can happen. And moreover, Folsom Field should be sold out and hyped for an upset.

Prediction: ASU 45, Colorado 10



Sun Devils Athletics

GAME CHANGER: Angelo Richardson makes mark on ASU program six years after being knocked off course by two bullets.



Associated Press

1-ON-1 WITH GRAHAM: Todd Graham discusses the Sun Devils' fast start on the 110 Sports Podcast.

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TEMPE, Ariz. -- With what could be one of the biggest games in Arizona State's recent history one week away, it's easy to forget the Sun Devils have to play Colorado first.

The promotional campaign for ASU's annual "blackout" game against Oregon on Oct. 18 began shortly after ASU beat California at Memorial Stadium for the first time since 1997.

The Sun Devils, however, have made it explicitly clear this week they won't be caught looking ahead when they face the Buffaloes on Thursday night in Boulder, Colo.

"We're not looking past them at all," junior safety Alden Darby said. "We're preparing for them, like I've said, as if we're preparing for USC or Oregon. We're taking them seriously. Anybody can beat anybody in college football."

Colorado (1-4, 1-1 Pac-12) is no doubt an underdog. The Buffaloes opened the season with three straight losses, to Colorado State, Sacramento State (an FCS opponent) and Fresno State (69-14). They edged Washington State 35-34 in their Pac-12 opener before losing at home to UCLA 42-14 and heading into their bye week.

That bye week, ASU coach Todd Graham said, gave Colorado a chance to better prepare for the Sun Devils and recharge before the second half of the season.

"I think the biggest thing is knowing that they have a bunch of guys back that have been hurt," Graham said. "They're going to be at full strength. They're going to be at home.

"Every team is going to be their best at home, so when you go in there, as a team, there has to be a great focus, a great mental focus about what you are doing."

Graham said he has harped this week on not overlooking Colorado and coming out with the necessary intensity for a road game, one that's expected to be in front of a sellout crowd.

He has been pleased with his players' reaction. Just as much, Graham has preached fundamentals this week, perhaps tipping his hand just a bit that ASU is sharpening those for the tougher tests ahead.

From a matchup standpoint, Arizona State has essentially every advantage over Colorado. The Sun Devils' conference-best scoring defense (13.6 points allowed per game) should have little trouble shutting down Colorado's conference-worst scoring offense (21.6 points per game).

Sophomore quarterback Taylor Kelly and an ASU offense averaging 456.2 yards per game should bowl over a defense giving up 474.4 per game.

The trends continue from there -- sacks, rushing, turnovers, etc. -- but that the Sun Devils holds countless advantages over Colorado should come as no surprise. The Buffaloes are still finding their footing while breaking in a young roster in their second season of Pac-12 competition.

This week Colorado could be without its top rusher, freshman Christian Powell, who suffered a hip bruise in Colorado's last game.

Quarterback Jordan Webb triggers the Colorado attack, and Graham is impressed with what he's seen of him.

"I like their quarterback," Graham said. "He's the guy we spent a lot of time on, and I think he's a very smooth operator. He gives them an opportunity."

Colorado Coach Jon Embree is acutely aware of the challenge Webb faces in ASU's powerful defensive line, which has helped ASU tally 21 sacks, and particularly defensive tackle Will Sutton, who has tormented opponents' offensive lines.

"He needs to go ahead and start getting paid," second-year Colorado coach Jon Embree joked. "He's the best (defensive) lineman by far in our conference. I love the kid's motor and passion. ... He's a very good player. We're going to have to find answers for him."

Beyond any statistics or matchups, though, ASU knows upsets happen in college football, and Graham earlier this week cited unranked North Carolina State's upset of then No. 3 Florida State last Saturday.

"One thing about Division I ball: You can't just shut down because a team is not so good," senior cornerback Deveron Carr said. "Like they say, Thursday nights on ESPN, bad things happen all the time. If you go in there and you lack mental preparation and you lack focus out here at practice, on that Thursday you will lose."

If the focus remains intact for four quarters, ASU should find itself off to a 5-1 start -- as it did a year ago. At least theoretically, this game gives ASU an opportunity to fine-tune itself before tackling the toughest part of its schedule -- home games with No. 2 Oregon and UCLA and road games against No. 10 Oregon State and No. 11 USC.

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