

Football: CU Buffs' Jon Embree looking for answers on offense

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

There are a ton of jaw-dropping negative statistics and notes being produced by the Colorado football program in the first season-and-a-half under coach Jon Embree.

But after the Buffs endured another beat down on their home field Thursday night at the hands of Arizona State, this one might stand out above the rest.

In nearly five full seasons -- a total of 58 games -- under former coach Dan Hawkins, the Buffs suffered 10 blowout losses by margins of 20 points or more. Under Embree, the Buffs have equaled that total in just 19 games.

Eight of those 10 lopsided losses have come against Pac-12 Conference opponents.

Opinions abound over why the program is struggling so badly in its transition to a new conference and this coaching staff.

Some believe it's a product of Hawkins leaving Embree very little talent with which to work. Others believe Embree and his coaching staff, particularly coordinators Greg Brown and Eric Bieniemy, aren't up to the task because all three men had limited or no previous experience in their current roles before they were hired at CU. And others believe it's a combination of those issues.

To Embree's credit, he hasn't shied away from taking responsibility for the Buffs' poor showings and he also has shown he's willing to adapt as he goes. More of that could be in store during the second half of the season.

During his postgame comments Thursday night, Embree made it clear that he believes his defense is doing enough to win games and he has been disappointed with the inability of the offense to be more productive.

Embree said he planned to meet with his offensive staff Friday afternoon to discuss ways of improving the offense and scoring more points in the second half of the season, which is definitely the tougher half of the 2012 schedule.

In an interview with the Camera on Friday morning, Embree expanded on his thoughts about the need for more offensive production. He said he understands the perception created by lopsided scores is that the defense is the major problem, and he wants to see improvement on that side of the ball, too. But he believes that aside from the 69-14 loss at Fresno State, the defense has played well enough to win this season.

"This conference is an offensive conference," Embree said. "You're going to have to score 30-plus points to have a chance to win. Our defense has given us a chance. (Thursday) night it was 34-17 for a long time and if we can put some pressure on them and do some things offensively, that helps the defense out.

"When you're playing these spread offenses and you're sprinting 40, 50 yards every snap to try to get to the ball, it starts wearing you down. So the combination of us not scoring and three-and-outs, you put your defense at risk. That's exactly what we've done."

It got away from the Buffs on Thursday in the fourth quarter when they allowed 17 points. Meanwhile the CU offense didn't score a point in the second half.

Freshman cornerback Kenneth Crawley said after the game that he believes some of his teammates on defense quit

down the stretch against the Sun Devils.

"I feel as though the defense gave up, some players gave up," Crawley said. "They're a hell of a team. They've got a lot of great athletes, but I felt like we should have done better."

Crawley was asked why he thought some of his teammates quit.

"We're down for one," he said. "That's basically it. We was down. ... I know there was some (quit) out there."

Embree and CU junior Parker Orms both said they don't agree with Crawley's assessment that some players threw in the towel. Embree said he believes the Sun Devils' final touchdown was a product of CU defenders not being able to focus after watching linebacker Brady Daigh taken off the field on a stretcher.

Embree reported Daigh had passed all necessary tests and was released from the hospital. He said the sophomore might be healthy enough to play as early as this week.

The Buffs are scoring just 20.6 points per game and are one of the worst rushing teams in the nation averaging 110 yards a game. Embree said those facts must change for CU to be more competitive going forward.

"We've got to look and find ways of how to run the football better," Embree said. "I mean, how many fourth-and-1s have we not made this year? We got to have a way to run the ball and say, 'Hey, we can run this play and get three of four yards.'

"We've got to, as a staff, find a way to help the kids and find a way for us to be able to do that. ... If you look at other scores around the conference at what other teams are doing, you got to get around 30 points, and we're not doing that."

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What is CU Buffs' psyche as tough second-half stretch looms?

By Tom Kensler *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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BOULDER — With a difficult first half to its football season now in the rearview mirror, Colorado can at least look ahead.

Up next: road games at Southern California and Oregon.

Gulp.

"We have a tough schedule coming up," senior tight end Nick Kasa said Thursday night after a 51-17 home loss to Arizona State. "But we're not looking at it like that.

"We can't say, 'It's a tough game this week, so we have to prepare harder.' We have to prepare harder anyway."

On the back end of Colorado's schedule, it's all Pac-12, all the time. The road games against USC (on Oct. 20) and Oregon (on Oct. 27) will be followed by a home game against Stanford (on Nov. 3), at Arizona (on Nov. 10), home against Washington (on Nov. 17) and the season finale at home against Utah (on Nov. 23).

A 23-point underdog Thursday night, CU (1-5, 1-2 Pac-12) scored 10 points in the final 24 seconds of the first half and looked competitive in pulling within 20-17 at the break.

But ASU's Rashad Ross ran untouched while returning the second half kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown, and CU never recovered. The home team was outscored 31-0 after halftime.

"I was embarrassed," CU senior defensive tackle Will Pericak said.

Shaking their heads, several players noted that the Thursday night's game was an ESPN national telecast for all to see. Colorado fans had better hope that recruits look first for an opportunity to play when considering programs, as CU coaches have suggested. Colorado's lack of proven talent and the potential to play right away had to be about the only thing that impressed potential recruits.

The Buffs appear to have become a fragile team emotionally. That's not unusual when players on a young team have suffered through loss after loss after loss.

"After they ran that kickoff back, we still thought we had a great shot," junior safety Terrel Smith said. "But that kind of like took the air out of us a little bit."

Colorado coach Jon Embree was asked after the game what his team needs to work on to improve.

"All phases," Embree answered.

The Buffs are dead last among Pac 12 teams in scoring offense, scoring defense, pass defense and pass defense efficiency.

The first thing CU must do is put two good halves together, Embree said.

"We have to play a complete game," he said. "We have to keep grinding away."

Late Thursday, players talked about putting the game behind them. But Pericak sounded concerned about where the team's psyche is at this point.

"We have to have some pride; that didn't really show up in the second half," Pericak said. "We kind of got deflated. We can't let that happen."

Footnote. CU linebacker Brady Daigh, who injured his neck late in Thursday night's game, underwent tests at Boulder Community Hospital and all were negative, the school announced Friday. Daigh was released and did not stay overnight. His neck is sore, but otherwise he is fine.

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