



CU defensive back Parker Orms has been looking forward to facing USC's Matt Barkley.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Buffs' Option Is To Defend Barkley, Trojans

Release: 10/19/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

LOS ANGELES - Let's say you're Greg Brown and this week you're searching for a silver lining . . . this might be the best you can come up with: Southern California, the team Brown's Colorado defense faces Saturday in the Los Angeles Coliseum, doesn't run the zone read option.

OK, that qualifies as a sliver of a silver lining, a mere glimmer if ever there was one. But if you're Brown and the Buffs, hey, you latch onto whatever's there.

His worn-down, smacked-around defense is allowing almost 500 yards and just over 41 points a game, including averages of 542 yards and 46 points in the two most recent losses against offenses that featured dual threat quarterbacks and relied heavily on their sleight of hand and misdirection. The results were agonizing: UCLA hammered CU 42-14, Arizona State followed that up with a 51-17 rout.

Offensively, No. 11 USC is an altogether different species. When quarterback Matt Barkley runs, it's usually off the field after throwing a touchdown pass to either Marqise Lee (seven) or Robert Woods (five). Or, Barkley might break into an occasional trot for a gulp of Gatorade . . . or maybe to get a better glimpse of USC's Song Girls.

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Said Brown: "You've got a lottery pick in Matt Barkley so they certainly can't afford to take any chances with him being hurt. True, USC doesn't run any option, but they obviously have tremendously talented people at the skill positions. They're able to make you pay badly. It's pick your poison, but it's a poison of a different type."

Added CU junior defensive back Parker Orms: "I'm not sure if Barkley can run; I'm not sure what his stats are. I know he can hand the ball off and stay in the pocket and throw it."

Really, now, is there need for anything else? But here's an FYI for Orms: Barkley's running numbers are 15 rushes for minus-65 yards - counting sack yardage - through six games. He won't pass on any opportunity to pass.

The NFL doesn't covet Barkley's legs; as long as they hold up he's a dead-solid first-round pick and probably the first overall selection in next spring's draft. He made Trojans fans delirious by returning for his senior season, and halfway through it he's completed 121 of 193 passes for 1,475 yards and 16 TDs (six picks). He was a preseason Heisman Trophy frontrunner, but after struggling in a couple of wins and in a startling loss to Stanford he's fallen well back in that conversation.

But there's plenty of time to catch up and as CU coach Jon Embree said, "When you start talking about (USC), you start with Matt Barkley." Embree went on. Barkley has "two great receivers - game-changers - out there in Woods and Lee," he said. "Then they picked up the kid from Penn State (Silas Redd) that gives them a tailback to match their talent on the edge. Defensively we have our work cut out for us; we have to do a good job of tackling and covering. They'll find as many ways as they can to get the ball out there to those guys and let them try to make plays."

Lee is averaging 12.6 yards a catch, Woods 10. Redd runs for 5.6 yards a carry and averages a team-best 95 yards a game. But as a whole, the Trojans offense hasn't been the weekly dynamo that coach Lane Kiffin projected, slipping into the middle of the pack in the Pac-12 Conference at 415.2 total yards a game.

After last week's defense-inspired 24-14 win at Washington that saw the Trojans offense shut out in the second half and Barkley throw for his lowest passing total since his sophomore season (167 yards, 66 in the second half going 3-for-10), Kiffin said, "I continue to remind myself there's one goal and that's to win the game. Are the numbers what we're used to? No. But we won."

Brown scoffed at the suggestion that USC is limping along offensively. "I don't see it," he said, noting that Washington's second-half success last week resulted from the Huskies "having good people" and playing "a couple of different schemes. They gave (the Trojans) a couple of different looks and didn't sit in the same thing all the time. They were proficient at it."

If Brown's defense can't hold up against Barkley, Lee, Woods, Redd, et al, USC's offensive "slump" will come to a spectacular halt Saturday in the sold-out (93,607) Coliseum. Brown is a Kiffin admirer, saying the third-year Trojans coach "has been everywhere, done it, seen it, knows all the ins and outs. When you say he's been around the block, this guy's been around the city."

"What they do, they're going to take a typical play but it's going to be dressed up in motions and formations so much that you're not going to know it's a typical play until the ball is snapped. That's an effort to keep you unsure and on edge; they're not going to line up and say, 'Here we go.' They're going to run the ball and then for good measure try to throw it over your heads to make sure you're awake . . . it's an eye-opening offense."

Unlike what CU saw from UCLA and ASU, USC offers misdirection of a different sort in a fairly conventional scheme. But it's populated by top-tier personnel. It offers a challenge that Orms said he and the Buffs accept: "I want to play the best and they have the best guys, some of the best guys in the nation . . . their whole team is a lot of (future) NFL guys. I just want to see how I can match up with some of them. I just know our guys aren't afraid or anything like that. We're anxious to get out there and see how we match up. We can finally be in a base defense with bigger guys and I can go back to play safety, which I'm excited about."

Orms called the 6-2, 230-pound Barkley "definitely the first NFL-type quarterback we've played this season. He's a pocket passer, a play-action passer. He's accurate and has guys who make plays for him, too. I'm excited to play him. I didn't get to play Andrew Luck (Stanford) and I really wanted to play him last year, but I didn't get that opportunity."

Through the season's first half, Orms ranks fifth among the Buffs in total tackles (39, 33 solo), has broken up six passes and has made four third-down stops. But he wants a pick: "I need an interception," he said. "I need to get the ball in my hands in some way. I haven't been able to do that this year. I've had some opportunities and just didn't turn my head around fast enough or make the catch. I feel like that's a thing you have to do playing DB; you've got to create turnovers and I haven't done any of that this year."

But he has stayed healthy, a rarity for him at CU. "That's a blessing," he said. "I've played six straight games - and I haven't done that since my senior year of high school. I'm just happy for that, but I want to change this season around."

When Orms signed with CU in 2009, the Buffs were members of the Big 12 Conference and faced a different cast of big-name opponents. "I signed to play Nebraska, Texas, Oklahoma, now I get to play USC, Oregon and Stanford," he said. "I'm going to the Coliseum on Saturday and can't wait."

He admitted that the first half of the Buffs season (1-5 overall, 1-2 Pac-12) produced "a lot of guys who are discouraged. But we have coaches who are pushing us every week. Why did you come to Colorado? What does the fight song mean to you? What do those words 'fight, fight, fight' mean to you? Some guys are going to get that, (with) some guys it's going in one ear and out the other.

"They're thinking about their future. I've tried as much as I can to let the freshmen know it goes fast. You don't know if you'll be able to play next season or when your career is going to end. The first half of the season didn't go well, but we have six more games left and you can either try and turn that around or you can give up."

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Thorburn: CU Buffs have yet to take next step

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

On Dec. 30, 2007, Alabama and Colorado met in the Independence Bowl. It was supposed to be a stepping stone for two programs on the way back up.

The Crimson Tide won 30-24, but only because the Buffs ran out of time during a furious rally in the second half.

And then the two programs headed in opposite directions.

Since that night in Shreveport, La., Nick Saban has guided Alabama to a 54-6 record with two national championships. The Crimson Tide is currently 6-0 and ranked No. 1 in the polls and the BCS standings.

CU went 13-23 over the final three seasons of the Hawk-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named era and is 4-15 a season and a half into Jon Embree's reign.

The Buffs are 1-5 this season with three consecutive games looming against ranked opponents.

Embree's team is a 40-point underdog against No. 11 USC Saturday night at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

"Forty-one," Lane Kiffin corrected when asked about the Las Vegas line by reporters.

In an effort to get the Trojans (5-1) focused on this David vs. Goliath matchup in the Pac-12's South Division, Kiffin reportedly replaced the CU logo with an Alabama logo on the depth chart.

Even more insulting, USC's head coach has already talked about doing the poor little Buffs a favor by not running the score up just to impress voters.

"Our goal is to win the game and stay as healthy as possible," Kiffin told ESPNLosAngeles.com. "We're not gonna get into what you see other people do."

That might be easier said than done. Fresno State's effort to not to run up the score was unsuccessful the last time the Buffs visited California.

Last season in Boulder, Matt Barkley threw a USC record six touchdown passes during a 42-17 win. The senior will break Matt Leinart's program and conference record of 99 career touchdown passes with four more.

That could very well happen before halftime against this CU defense, which ranks 117th in the FBS in scoring defense (41.3 ppg).

Good news: Senior safety Ray Polk says he will play.

Bad news: Marqise Lee and Robert Woods will also be suiting up with the intention of setting records and getting Barkley back in the Heisman Trophy race.

"We just need to communicate what the coverage is going to be," Embree said when asked about facing a future NFL quarterback and receivers with freshmen cornerbacks. "That will be the main thing for those guys, and I am sure that they are excited about it. I mean, this is why they came here, for the opportunity to play against the talent they have been able to play against and have an opportunity to play early."

"This is just the next step in that process for them."

The next step for CU football was supposed to be winning games. Or at least half of their 12 games.

Embree obviously felt much better about his team's prospects of doing that back in August when he stated that making it to a bowl for the first time in five years was the 2012 goal of the program.

That four-letter B-word hasn't been mentioned since stunning losses to Colorado State, Sacramento State and Fresno State.

If the Buffs don't pull off the upset of the year Saturday night, they'll have to pull off the upset of the century next week against No. 2 Oregon just to keep their fleeting New Mexico Bowl hopes alive.

CU has won its last two Pac-12 road games but lost 18 consecutive road games against ranked opponents dating back to a 31-17 win over UCLA in 2002 at the Rose Bowl.

A lot of fans would just like to the Buffs -- who were only down 20-17 at halftime against Arizona State only to get outscored 31-0 after the intermission -- to play a competitive four-quarter game.

"To go in there and scare SC and to earn a little respect, right now that's the biggest step they could take because they're not taking any other steps in any other things that they're doing," former CU head coach Gary Barnett said Friday on 102.3 FM in Denver. "So that would be a huge step."

There aren't a lot of black-and-gold believers right now.

CU sold 2,100 tickets from its allotment of 2,500 for the game, which means approximately 91,507 USC fans will be there expecting to see carnage.

If this were the Roman Colosseum, the Buffs would be the Christians and the Trojans would be the lions.

Oh for the good old days when Alabama and CU were on the same playing field.

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Saturday, October 20, 2012

USC-Colorado: 10 things to watch

By Pedro Moura

The [USC Trojans](#) face perhaps their final tuneup of the 2012 season in the Coliseum against the [Colorado Buffaloes](#) on Saturday at 3 p.m. PT, a last chance to get things right before games against the [Arizona Wildcats](#) and [Oregon Ducks](#) over the next two weeks.

The Trojans are coming off a 10-point road win against Washington. We take a look at 10 things to watch in Saturday's action.

1. Time to break some records. It all lines up. Lane Kiffin likes to set records, and his quarterback and wide receiver are on the verge of some meaningful ones. Let's put it this way: It would be very surprising if both [Matt Barkley](#) and [Robert Woods](#) didn't set their marks tomorrow. Barkley needs four touchdown passes to break Matt Leinart's all-time school and conference mark of 99 scoring throws, and Woods needs five grabs to pass Dwayne Jarrett's 216 career catches in a USC uniform. There's about -- what? -- a 90 percent chance both players do it against the Buffaloes.

2. A test for the tackles. Like almost all college football teams, the Buffaloes have some talented players ... just not enough. Their left tackle, junior [David Bakhtiari](#), is an NFL prospect who would slot right in above USC's [Aundrey Walker](#) on the Trojans' line. But he's really the only Colorado player who'd be a for-sure starter in L.A. There's another one who could prove a threat, though: the 6-3, 250-pound defensive end [Chidera Uzo-Diribe](#), who's been timed at 4.5 in the 40-yard dash. He'll line up directly across from Walker and [Max Tuerk](#) at left tackle; he has six sacks this season, so he'll be a good test for the two offensive linemen. Walker's been wrecked by the good ends he's faced this year.

3. Not the outcome, the score. Let's be honest, Colorado's not beating USC. If the Buffaloes somehow topped the Trojans, it'd be one of the biggest sporting upsets in recent memory. It's not even a possibility, though, right? But keeping track of the score could be interesting, because USC's at the point of the season where it really could matter. If the Trojans only beat the Buffs by 21 and someone else beats them by 42, that someone else is going to boast about that mark in a month. Kiffin said he has no plans to run up the score, but it's important to at least make the final margin look nice and convincing.

4. How many will be watching? This game will be on the Pac-12 Network, the second time a USC game has been broadcast there this season. Many Trojans fans don't have the network, and a lot of college football fans don't have it, either. Adding to the fact that West Virginia and Kansas State will be kicking off an hour later, it seems likely to be USC's least-watched game this year -- by far. (All the more reason to run up the score late.)

5. More Shaw, or back to Harris? Kiffin's not saying who he's starting, but logical signs point to [Josh Shaw](#) getting another go at corner against Colorado. He played well last week, and [Torin Harris](#) got hurt. Against an opponent like the Buffs, with games against Arizona and Oregon up next, it makes a lot of sense to rest any players who've been ailing at all as of late.

6. Walker and Tuerk. The second corner spot has been one of two problem spots for the Trojans this year. The other has been left tackle. Tuerk, a true freshman, is getting another crack at Walker's job this week, although it's not known who'll be getting the start. It's safe to assume that the player who looks

better against the Buffs will be the starter against Arizona next weekend, and that's actually a fairly big deal.

7. Crowd. USC has sold out Saturday's game, quite an accomplishment considering the opponent. Colorado couldn't even sell out its allotted amount of 2,500 seats. The Trojans have talked all week about how much it means to be back at home, so the Coliseum crowd could really support that argument by filling up by kickoff -- or at least early in the first quarter -- and staying until the fourth. The loudest point is probably going to be early. It's parents' weekend at the school, too.

8. Second-stringers. The whole point of the hoopla surrounding USC naming a backup quarterback in the summer was that he was going to have to play a lot when the Trojans opened up big leads over teams and brought in the backups. That hasn't really happened, and [Max Wittek](#) hasn't thrown a single pass over the last five games as Barkley's backup. That should change Saturday, and it should be good experience for the guy who appears to have the early lead in becoming Barkley's successor. Skill-position players like [D.J. Morgan](#), Buck Allen, [De'Von Flourney](#) and [George Farmer](#) also should get more opportunities.

9. Speaking of Farmer ... Has there been a bigger disappointment for the Trojans over the last year and a half than George Farmer? It's sad, but it's true. The ultra-top prospect has done virtually nothing this season after an up-and-down freshman year. His breakout needs to come sometime soon, if it's ever going to happen. Injuries have been an issue and drops have been, too, but his biggest problem has been wholly mental. Would it surprise people if he suddenly came out and caught two touchdown passes tomorrow, though? Not really.

10. Penalties. Flags have been USC's single biggest teamwide issue this season. You can't be the worst in the country at anything and expect to be a dominant team, but that's what the Trojans have done through six games. If they can't fix it in Saturday's game, then it's an even bigger problem than we've realized. The biggest culprits are Walker, tight end [Xavier Grumble](#) and overall delays of game on the offense ... plus a myriad of offenders on special teams.

Out of Africa comes Colorado's future at offensive tackle

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Who could have guessed that the future of Colorado's offensive line would come out of Africa? That's redshirt freshman Stephane Nembot, a 6-foot-8, 305-pound mountain of a man from Cameroon.

Relatively new to football, Nembot has started two games this season and graded as high as 77 percent as a right tackle in CU's loss to UCLA — a promising number for such a raw player who arrived in Boulder as a defensive end. Nembot in ways is symbolic of CU's youthful team, high on potential but somewhat overwhelmed right now in the Pac-12 Conference.

"Stephane has a bright future here," CU offensive line coach Steve Marshall said during preparations for Saturday's 4 p.m. game (Pac-12 Network) between Colorado (1-5, 1-2 Pac-12) and No. 11 Southern California (5-1, 3-1).

CU can only hope Nembot develops into another Nate Solder (6-8, 320), the former Colorado standout who became an NFL first-round draft pick and now starts for the New England Patriots. In the meantime, Nembot has a story to tell.

Growing up in Cameroon, Nembot (full name pronounced Steff-on Name-bot) played basketball, soccer and even team handball, a fast-paced sport that is foreign to most Americans but is wildly popular in Central Africa. Nembot's potential on the basketball court caught the eyes of a college coach in the United States who was scouting Africa. Seeing that path as a means toward a college education, Nembot came to the America as high school exchange student and enrolled as a junior at the now-defunct Montclair Prep in Van Nuys, Calif., a L.A. suburb.

Nembot was hoping to star in high school basketball, but his life changed when one of Montclair Prep's assistant football coaches asked Nembot if he would like to try that sport.

"I said: 'Nah. I came here for basketball,' " Nembot recalled. "He asked me if I liked to work out, and I said I always want to work out harder. So he said I could run with him and he'd show me some football stuff. That's how it started. He was the first one that got me in a weight room. Before that, all I knew was pushups."

Nembot got his feet wet on the football field as a high school junior — his first year in the sport — and earned second-team all-league honors as a defensive end while playing in just a handful of games. As a senior, he developed into a major-college prospect by recording 11 sacks and forcing two fumbles.

Rivals.com, the recruiting-based website, named the three-star Nembot "the most intriguing prospect in the West" because of his combination of size and strength and untapped potential.

"I really didn't know anything about football," Nembot said of his junior year in high school. "Coaches would say: 'See that? Just go to the football.' "

Nembot attended a well-known summer football camp in Southern California before his senior season to improve his individual skills and learn some of the nuances of the game. After his senior year at Montclair Prep, Nembot seemed to like every college program he visited. He extended a verbal commitment to Washington State before switching to Washington and then finally settling on Colorado after a trip to Boulder on the last weekend before the 2011 national signing day.

CU coach Jon Embree sold Nembot on becoming part of the Buffs' rebuilding project.

"I liked that," Nembot said. "I'm the kind of person that doesn't like anything to be given to me; I want to work for what I get."

"It's easy to go to a system that has been winning. But here at Colorado, when we start winning, people are going to remember the ones that helped bring it back."

Last year, Nembot practiced as a defensive end for the duration of Colorado's August camp. Then, during the first week of the regular season, he requested a move to offensive tackle, which he thought better suited his towering frame.

"My high school coach told me that in college I'd either be a great player at defensive end right away or I'd move to offensive tackle, and to not be surprised or disappointed if it happened," Nembot recalled. "I always remembered that."

After redshirting in 2011 to learn a new position, Nembot began this season third on the depth chart at right tackle. He is now listed second behind starter Jack Harris, a junior.

"Stephane is one of the strongest players I've ever played with," junior center Gus Handler said. "And, of course, he's huge."

Nembot was thrust into the starting lineup for games against Washington State and UCLA when an injury to Handler forced some shuffling along the line.

"Stephane has already played more this year than I anticipated. The guy's going to be a good player," said Marshall, Nembot's position coach. "Every day is an adventure for him, being so new to the game. But he's worked extremely hard, and he'll see some time this weekend (at USC)."

In no surprise, learning the fundamentals and subtleties of pass protection has been Nembot's biggest challenge.

"I like to play offensive tackle like I did as a defensive end and jump into the guy across from me," Nembot said. "To do that drop step (in pass protection) is something that doesn't seem natural."

For a native of Africa, few things in football are.

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