

CU Buffs coach Jon Embree wants struggling team to stay positive

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

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BOULDER — If the Kodak moment could be framed, it would hang on the wall of the Colorado football offices as a symbol of the 2012 season. Preferably, though, it would hang in an equipment shed, where no one needs to be reminded of all that's gone wrong this season.

There was second-year coach Jon Embree and true freshman cornerback Kenneth Crawley last Saturday night, standing in the darkness of the Los Angeles Coliseum parking lot. Crawley had given up two touchdown passes to Southern California's Robert Woods, who was on his way to becoming the Trojans' career receptions leader during their 50-6 rout of the Buffs.

One more Pac-12 game. One more Pac-12 blowout loss for CU. One more young Buffalo trying to keep his chin off parking lot gravel.

"I told him, 'One day, if you want to play in the NFL, you got a dose served to you,' " said Embree, an NFL assistant for four years. " 'You're going against a top-10 pick at receiver and maybe the top pick in the draft at quarterback (Matt Barkley). That's what it looks like.'

"So you have two choices: You can mope and feel sorry for yourself, which no one else will, or that could be impetus to get you to come out and work that much harder and continue to improve and eventually you'll be that guy where they won't throw your way, because anytime they come over there you're intercepting it or knocking it down."

One of the downsides of rebuilding a football program from rubble is putting true freshmen barely old enough to vote defending college All-Americans who are deciding which agents to hire. Consequently, Embree and his upperclassmen counsel the young guys to not get down on themselves.

Problem is, things only seem to get worse. Colorado (1-6, 1-3 Pac-12) plays Saturday at second-ranked Oregon (7-0, 4-0), which is No. 2 nationally in scoring (averaging 51 points per game) and a 45-point favorite.

For CU's veterans, this has become old hat. A loss Saturday clinches a school-record seventh consecutive losing season. But the young players are the base of the rebuilding project. Embree can't afford for those players to go the way of their record.

"It is embarrassing," CU junior safety Parker Orms said of the onslaught of lopsided losses. "We've just got to keep fighting. Even if we're getting blown out, guys have to play through it. Play for the guys in the huddle. Play for your pride. That's all you can do."

Added senior linebacker Doug Rippey: "We're just trying to keep the younger guys up. That's the tough thing. They make mistakes and they score and all of a sudden they get down on themselves. As a senior and a leader of this team, you tell them, 'You've got to focus on the next play.' "

Few coaches are doing more counseling than Embree. The 16 true freshmen on the season-opening depth chart were the most in school history and 13 have played, tied for sixth-most nationally, according to CU sports information.

Besides Crawley, defensive tackle Samson Kafovalu and tailback Christian Powell are other true freshmen expected to start Saturday against the Ducks.

"At some point you've got to get to where it's not about who you're playing," Embree said. "It's about the opportunity to play."

Tell that to a bunch of freshmen who reached this level by winning. In his three years, Crawley's H.D. Woodson High School team in Washington went 24-12. He was SuperPrep's No. 2 overall prospect in the city and the 18th-ranked cornerback in the country.

"It's hard, but at the end of the day I know we're going to be better in the long run," Crawley said. "You've just got to come out every week and improve, knowing we're still young. Some people expect that."

Wide receiver Nelson Spruce is a redshirt freshman from Westlake Village, Calif., who also came to CU unaccustomed to losing. Sometimes, Embree said, his young players get physically overmatched.

"It's just maybe the speed of the game overall," said Spruce, who leads the Buffs with 28 catches. "We're all out here as Division I athletes. I don't think the talent varies too much. It's just adjusting to the game as a freshman."

If the Buffs can find inspiration, they can look at true freshman Vincent Hobbs. The backup tight end's freshman year at Mesquite High near Dallas started 1-6.

"Then we went to district and we went undefeated," Hobbs said. "It hit us and everything changed. We went undefeated in district and went three rounds deep in the playoffs. It goes to show that anything can happen."

CU Buffs athletic director Mike Bohn sees improvement in 1-6 team

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BOULDER — Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said he sees improvement in the Buffaloes' 1-6 football team and this season is still "an incomplete."

The Buffaloes visit second-ranked Oregon on Saturday coming off a 50-6 loss at 11th-ranked Southern California.

"We see improvement," said Bohn, who hired CU coach Jon Embree before last season. "Unfortunately, the improvement is not showing up on the scoreboard."

Bohn was asked what improvement he sees in a team whose last four losses have been by an average score of 53-13.

"The ability to make adjustments quicker," Bohn said. "For example, we started the season with a no-huddle offense and he quickly made the adjustment there. He then made further adjustments prior to the Washington State game associated with some offensive schemes that they were able to put together and had the ability to rally the forces behind that."

CU's lone victory came with a fourth-quarter comeback at Washington State.

Bohn added that the season is barely half over and the Buffaloes close the season with three of their last four games at home against 19th-ranked Stanford (5-2), Washington (3-4) and Utah (2-5).

"Then maybe we can learn a little bit more," Bohn said. "We're still learning. We're still evaluating. I think Jon is going through the same process associated with players, key positions."

"It's an incomplete because we have so much more football to be played." John Henderson, The Denver Post

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OT Jack Harris, CB Yuri Wright back for Buffaloes

By **JOHN HENDERSON** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Colorado is beginning to heal and will welcome back starting right tackle Jack Harris and backup cornerback Yuri Wright.

Harris returns from a concussion suffered in practice Oct. 16 that forced him out of Saturday's 50-6 loss at Southern California. Coach Jon Embree sounded as if the junior will start Saturday at second-ranked Oregon. Redshirt freshman Stephane Nembot replaced him at USC in a game which Embree called one of the line's best of the year.

Wright, one of the true freshman cornerbacks thrown in the fire, has been out with a concussion since Oct. 2. He'll be counted on against an Oregon offense that's second nationally in scoring at 51 points a game.

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