

## Football: CU Buffs will have hands full with Arizona State

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

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If the numbers so far this season are to be trusted as an indicator of what might happen Thursday night when Colorado hosts Arizona State at Folsom Field, it figures to be a difficult night for the CU offensive line.

It's fair to say the Buffs have struggled to protect the quarterback this season. In fact, the California Bears are the only team in the nation giving up more sacks per game than the Buffs, who are allowing 4.4 each week and a total of 22 in the first five games, according to official NCAA statistics.

This week the Buffs face an aggressive attacking Sun Devils defense that is among the best in the nation thus far in putting pressure on the quarterback and generating turnovers.

The anchor of that ASU defense is a defensive lineman CU coach Jon Embree says is already good enough to be playing in the NFL on Sundays. Last week as the Buffs rested during a bye and healed up for the start of a brutal stretch of difficult Pac-12 Conference games, Embree said Sun Devils' defensive tackle Will Sutton is the best defensive lineman he has seen so far this season.

"I love the kid's motor and the passion," Embree said after early film study of ASU. "He plays the game like you want him to play. ...He's a very good player. We're going to have to find answers for him."

Embree isn't the only man in black and gold to take note of Sutton and the rest of the ASU defensive front. Center Gus Handler, who hopes to return from injury after missing the past two games, said is looking forward to the tough task of giving quarterback Jordan Webb time to throw.

"He's got a good get-off and he's a little bit shorter so he can get under you," Handler said. "He's just quick and agile. I know they list him at like 270. So he's not as big as some other guys, but he's just as tough as anyone else."

Sutton, a 6-foot-1, 267-pound product of Corona, Calif., leads the Sun Devils with 6 1/2 sacks and 10 total tackles for loss, but he won't be the only problem for the CU offensive line. Two other ASU defenders -- Junior Onyeali from Mullen High School in Denver and Carl Bradford -- have at least four sacks a piece.

Sutton is fifth in the nation in sacks individually and the Sun Devils are third in sacks as a team, having wrangled opposing quarterbacks 21 times in five games. ASU also has eight interceptions this season.

"It just goes to show that they're a good defense," Handler said. "You can't just key off one guy. It's going to be a good challenge."

The CU defense also will have its hands full. The Sun Devils are averaging 456 yards of total offense and 38 points per game. ASU dismantled the Buffs 48-14 last season in Tempe, Ariz., and running back Cameron Marshall led the charge with 114 rushing yards and three touchdowns. Marshall is back this year, but he's not even the Sun Devils' leading rusher.

Third-year sophomore quarterback Taylor Kelly has been efficient in the passing game and also makes plays on the run. He has completed 68 percent of his passes for nearly 1,300 yards with nine touchdowns and just two interceptions.

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Arizona State at Colorado, 7 p.m., Thursday, ESPN

For the record: Like Colorado, ASU (4-1, 2-0 Pac-12) comes off an open date. ASU won 27-17 at California on Sept. 29.

Streaking: Under first-year coach Todd Graham, the Sun Devils are the only Pac-12 South team still unbeaten in conference play, with wins vs. Utah and at Cal.

Who's hot: Sophomore QB Taylor Kelly has better passing stats through his first five college starts (1,292 yards, nine touchdowns) than another Sun Devils QB who was from Idaho, Jake Plummer (1,007 yards, six TDs). Through Sept. 29 action, Kelly topped the Pac-12 in pass efficiency.

Who's not: Sun Devils punt coverage. Entering last weekend, ASU ranked 11th among Pac-12 teams in net punting (35.7 yards) despite Sun Devils punter Josh Hubner ranking second (45.3) in gross average.

Key stat: ASU's defense entered last weekend's games ranked first among Pac-12 teams in total defense, pass defense, scoring defense and pass-efficiency defense.

FYI: Last year, ASU went 6-7 in Dennis Erickson's final season and was picked in the 2012 preseason Pac-12 media poll to finish fifth in the South Division, ahead of Colorado.

Injury report: Freshman LB Carlos Mendoza was lost for the year with a shoulder injury against Illinois on Sept. 8. He had two interceptions in that game before getting hurt.

Coachspeak: "I'm proud of the guys. I was worried about that (early) part of the season because you have so much new schematically (with the spread offense)." — ASU's Graham, after the Sept. 29 win at Cal.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post