



CU coach Jon Embree wants to see the Buffs finally enjoy themselves on a college football Saturday.

Photo Courtesy: Associated Press



Brooks: Buffs Want 'W,' A Little Fun In Pac-12 Opener

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PULLMAN, Wash. - Are we having fun yet? In a word, no, and three dreadful games into the 2012 season, that's among the major changes coach Jon Embree wants to see on his Colorado football team.

College football's main source of fun is winning. Embree's second CU team is a mirthless 0-3 and desperately needs to be reintroduced to the concept of a fun-filled Saturday.

"We're talking to the team about having fun," Embree said. "When they get into games, they get so robotic. With all the hard work you put in, the game is when you're supposed to have fun. We're not doing that."

So this week's message is: Relax, play smart, stay together and let the good times roll . . .

The Buffs appear focused on making it all happen here Saturday against Washington State in their Pac-12 Conference opener (2 p.m. MDT, FX). Not to undermine the message, but CU is a three-touchdown underdog after last week's south-of-sobering 69-14 loss against Fresno State.

In the wake of the Fresno flop, Embree met individually on Monday and Tuesday with each player on this week's

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traveling squad. The 10-minute listening/reassuring sessions apparently were well-timed, well-received and resulted in three energized practices before the team's departure for Spokane on Friday.

"Oh, yeah," said sophomore cornerback Greg Henderson, who is expected to start after missing the past two games with an ankle sprain. "Everybody is here for a reason, because of our athletic ability. Obviously you've got to just relax and play your game. Everybody is out there nervous and scared to make a mistake. They need to relax and play - that's all they need to do. If we do that, we've got a lot of playmakers on this team. So we do that, we'll start winning and having fun out there."

Of course, proof of positive results and a rerouting to good times must come Saturday afternoon in Martin Stadium, where a second consecutive sellout (33,522) is expected for the first time since the 2006 season. The Cougars (2-1) are eyeing their third straight win - another unprecedented achievement at Wazzu since 2006.

The guy generating September's good vibes in the Palouse is Mike Leach, the former Texas Tech coach who might have been a pirate in a former life and espouses a "Swing The Sword" (the title of his book) mentality in this life. Leach won't disclose his starting quarterback - it will be either sophomore Connor Halliday or senior Jeff Tuel - mainly because he's opposed to releasing injury reports to the media.

Earlier this week, he told reporters this on the starting QB subject: "You'll have to stay tuned and watch very closely. The anticipation is killing everyone, including me."

Of Halliday, who passed for 378 yards and four TDs in last week's 35-27 win at UNLV, Leach said: "He's way ahead of schedule for guy who played only a handful of games."

Of Tuel, the season starter who has been sidelined with an apparent knee injury, Leach noted: "He's ridiculously healthy. Tony the Tiger would be proud to have him be in a commercial and have him eat cereal."

Embree believes the Buffs defense, which surrendered 665 yards last week and is last in the Pac-12 in total defense (476.3 yards allowed a game), will see Halliday first. But, he added, it doesn't really matter. Whether it's Halliday or Tuel, the Buffs must be sound tacklers "in space" against Leach's spread offense and attempt to "shrink the field" and limit the Cougars to field goals.

In Leach's pass-heavy offense (42.1 pass attempts, 284.7 yards a game), his QBs "get rid of the ball so quick," Embree said. That can tire defensive linemen trying to bring pressure, so expect CU to frequently rotate its D-linemen when possible. "You try to figure out a way to get pressure," Embree added, "but if you bring too many (with blitzes) you expose yourself. (Leach) has a good blend of what he does."

As potent as the Cougars are with the pass, they've had problems defending it. WSU is last in the Pac-12 in pass defense, allowing 344.3 yards a game. (CU is No. 11 at 287.3.) Said Leach: "Some of that stuff (completions allowed) is just too easy. We've got to be tougher. Some of those kids in the secondary talk about being tough. They need to start proving they're tough."

Embree is looking for more energy from his players - on the field as well as the sidelines. In an attempt to address that, offensive coordinator/running backs coach Eric Bieniemy will move from the coaches' booth to the sidelines on Saturday.

When the shift was announced at Embree's Tuesday media luncheon, former CU coach Bill McCartney called Bieniemy "a live wire." That's an understatement; Bieniemy is a small nuclear device. But CU's offensive players believe his trip downstairs should be beneficial.

"He'll bring energy," starting quarterback Jordan Webb said. "He's that type of person, that type of coach. Also, another set of eyes down there and he can be in our ears as quarterbacks, letting us know what's out there. And he's definitely going to be able to help the running backs."

Backup Connor Wood said when opponents scored early or came back on the Buffs in the first three games, "That was a little demoralizing. I think as an offense we let that get to us. We would kind of sink . . . I think having a guy like Bieniemy on the sidelines will help the overall energy of the offense, keep it up, keep it in the huddle. He's a fierce, competitive guy. He can bring that to the sidelines."

Webb, Wood and their teammates hope opening Pac-12 play offers a fresh start that will help regenerate them. "Conference play is huge," Webb said. "I think we all understand the importance of conference play - especially in the type of conference we're in. It's really strong from top to bottom. We feel we have to come out and start it off right."

The Buffs (or their fans) couldn't fathom going winless in non-conference play, but that's how they've defined themselves. As former NFL coach Bill Parcells often observed, "You are your record." Still, CU left guard Alex Lewis said "there's definitely a strong belief" the Buffs can be better.

"We're going to stand by our coaches . . . we've bought into this program and we need guys to keep buying into it," Lewis said. "The moment you have one person not believing, it becomes a cancer on the team and you have to remove the cancer. I believe this team still believes in each other; we're still going to have each others' backs no matter what happens. We're going to come out fighting; we're not going to go down easily. We'll be swinging."

So will Pullman's newly adopted pirate.

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SHOW MENU



Colorado opens conference play at Washington State Saturday

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Jon Embree says he believes in his plan for rebuilding Colorado football. He says he believes in his players and he trusts his assistant coaches. He has spent a week defending all three.

The Buffs are in Pullman, Wash., Saturday to try to take a positive step toward validating their head coach's faith in them against Washington State after embarrassing him and themselves with a 69-14 loss at Fresno State last week.

In the rosy optimism of preseason when the Buffs were still kidding themselves with talk of a bowl game, they also spoke of this Saturday as an opportunity for redemption. They gave away a win in last season's game against the Cougars in Boulder by surrendering a 10-point lead in the final 5 minutes and they've been looking forward to a chance at a different result.

In the immediate aftermath of what might have been the most devastating loss of Embree's first season as coach, he asked his team a simple question with a powerful voice. While last season's 28 seniors are gone and the current depth chart is filled with underclassmen, Embree's year-old question remains unanswered by the Buffs and as integral to the future of the program as ever.

"When is it going to be enough? When is enough, enough?" Embree asked that day. "You put in all of this work, you do all of this stuff that you have done from spring ball to training camp for this? This is what we did the work for? So when is it enough?"

While the Buffs have had a few victories and some positive moments in the days since, last week's meltdown proved they still hadn't reached the point where enough is enough. Maybe losing by 55 points to a Mountain West Conference team will be the turning point. Only time will tell.

For now, the Buffs are 0-3, coming off two of the worst losses in school history and being made fun of by pretty much the rest of the college football nation. They went searching for something positive to hold on to this week and found it in a place few would suspect -- the arrival of Pac-12 Conference play.

While everyone else views the start of conference action with the reality that it's more difficult than the nonconference schedule which creates the possibility that CU won't win a game this season, Embree and his players are spinning it differently.

"I haven't said anything about it, but a lot of guys have said that in their meetings," Embree said this week when asked if putting nonconference disasters aside and focusing on the start of Pac-12 play can be a positive. "They talked about it is a fresh season. It is a fresh opportunity. That is good that it's coming from them."

The Buffs are 20-point underdogs and after last week some might not think that spread is wide enough.

A Colorado defense still missing two of its best players in linebacker Doug Rippey and safety Ray Polk and coming off a game in which it allowed 665 total yards of offense, must find a way to slow down the passing game designed by first-year Washington State coach Mike Leach.

The Cougars have used two quarterbacks this season and likely will again, but it hasn't been a big problem as they make the transition to Leach's system, which often means 50-60 pass attempts per game. WSU is averaging 284

yards passing so far in 2012.

Meanwhile, CU hasn't been able to find anything resembling consistency on offense, including the quarterback position. Coaches used three quarterbacks last week in the epic loss.

Junior Jordan Webb is likely to start his fourth consecutive game after completing five of 13 passes for 85 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions last week bringing his career record to 4-22. Webb's stats have been underwhelming in the first three games, but backup Connor Wood also had a dismal outing in his first sustained college action last week, completing five of 15 passes with two interceptions.

Both Webb and Wood threw interceptions returned for touchdowns, forcing CU coaches to give sophomore Nick Hirschman a look. Wood is also expected to play again Saturday, meaning both teams are likely to play at least two quarterbacks.

But regardless of who is on the field under center for the Buffs, that player has been asked to produce this season despite these challenges:

The running game has been non-existent in two of the first three games.

The offensive line has been unable to offer much in the way of pass protection.

The tight end position is manned by players with little experience, including senior Nick Kasa, a converted defensive lineman.

There is a glaring lack of speed at wide receiver, which means throws to wideouts are often tightly contested by defenders.

If Embree hopes to finally get a definitive answer to his question from last year, he and his coaches must first find answers for those issues. More persistence in the running game, shorter more creative pass routes and a defense that puts up more of a fight are good places to start.

Thorburn: CU Buffs looking for light at end of tunnel

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado has a half-game lead over USC in the Pac-12 South Division standings.

Go ahead and insert your own punch line if you must.

The Buffs have to find ways to stay positive. A perfect conference record (0-0) is the life raft the team is clinging to this week.

Coaches and players did their best to put the ghastly 0-3 nonconference results in the rear-view mirror and focus on Saturday's Pac-12 opener against Washington State at Martin Stadium.

"We've got to just forget about the past," junior safety Parker Orms said. "Even though that's hard to do."

Unfortunately, the losses to Colorado State, Sacramento State and Fresno State will live in infamy, unless Jon Embree can orchestrate a dramatic turnaround.

Spoiling Mike Leach's Pac-12 debut the way Washington State ruined Embree's Pac-12 debut a year ago would certainly be an unexpected step in the right direction.

The wise guys have the Buffs pegged as a 20-point underdogs. The good news is that line is for the entire game, not just the first quarter.

CU trailed Fresno State 35-0 after 15 minutes, 55-7 at the intermission and 69-14 when time expired.

"Just because you hit a wall or hit a road block or whatever you want to call it, doesn't mean you stop preparing, doesn't mean you succumb to it," Embree said. "You fight and you find a way to knock it down, and that's what we'll do."

Bill McCartney, architect of the program's 1990 national championship, did his best to rally support behind the current regime as the natives continue to get more and more restless.

"It doesn't happen overnight when you're laying the right foundation," McCartney said this week.

McCartney's first victory at CU? That would be a 12-0 win over Washington State in Spokane on Sept. 18, 1982.

The Buffs finished that season 2-8-1, went 4-7 in 1983, and 1-10 in 1984 before "Coach Mac" got things rolling and finished his career with 93 wins at CU.

Embree hinted about a timetable for seeing any light at the end of the tunnel when he said "look out" for the Buffs when Kenneth Crawley, Marques Mosley and Yuri Wright are juniors.

Right now they're true freshmen. They might not have experience or the correct technique to play at this level yet, but the trio does have a winning attitude.

"I just don't like losing," Mosley said when asked why he put himself back into the Fresno State game in the second half for more abuse when he was supposed to on the sideline taking care of a knee injury. "And if we're losing I still want to be in with the team and try to come back."

The Bulldogs scored on one-play drives of 97, 94 and 60 yards. CU allowed nine plays in the game that went for 20 or more yards and totaled 419 yards (46.6 yards per play).

The Buffs' defense looked like the Keystone Cops. That's how the players felt during the performance.

"It's just crazy plays. Some guys tripping and knocking another guy over, or just one guy thinking he's in a different defense and coming up," Orms explained. "That's what happened when big plays like that happened. We had a lot of them and we watched them over and over again (on film).

"We don't want to make those ever again."

Now an injury-riddled and baby-faced secondary will have to deal with Leach's spread attack.

Free safety Ray Polk won't play again Saturday . Starting cornerback Greg Henderson remains questionable. Mosley is hurting but willing to fight.

"It's kind of what happened to us last year. We only had a few games where all of the starting DBs were playing. That's kind of how it's going this year," Orms said. "We have a few guys that were major contributors last year and some of the best players on our team go down. We just have to step up until they get back."

There is a laundry list of problems on the offensive side of the ball as well.

CU still doesn't have a clear-cut starting quarterback. Jordan Webb and Connor Wood will both play again, although neither probably deserves to after their performances last week.

Christian Powell, whose breakout game against Sacramento State will take up most of the 2012 highlight reel for this team, was ignored for the most part after the Buffs fell behind at Bulldog Stadium.

There simply isn't enough depth, experience or speed at wide receiver to compete in the Pac-12.

The offensive line was pushed around on three consecutive Saturdays by guys who were not recruited by BCS programs.

Offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy now feels the need to coach from the sideline in order to try to get this group excited about playing football.

"He's a not coach to be messed with," left tackle David Bakhtiari said. "I would never want to be on the wrong side with him and I have a tremendous amount of respect for the man. I know for sure those kids will be looking around twice before trying to put their head down and trying to mope around."

Embree's message to the Buffs: Have some fun today.

Finding a way to move into first place in the standings ahead of the Trojans would certainly qualify.

"I think we can come out here and still be a factor in the Pac-12," Mosley said.

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Will changes on offense help winless Colorado?

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

After a victory, football coaches love to point out how players contributed on both sides of the ball. Unfortunately, that also can apply to losses.

Colorado can say its 0-3 start has been a team effort. Entering Saturday's Pac-12 opener (2 p.m., FX) in Pullman, Wash., against Washington State (2-1,0-0), the Buffaloes rank near the bottom of the heap in arguably the four most important statistical categories. Among 120 FBS teams, Colorado is:

- No. 113 in total offense (289.7 yards per game).
- No. 105 in scoring offense (19.7 points per game).
- No. 106 in total defense (479.7).
- No. 112 in scoring defense (40.3).

And that's against a relatively light nonconference schedule that did not include a team from any of the six power conferences but did have an FCS opponent in Sacramento State.

Yes, the Buffs have had true freshmen starting at cornerback. Yes, CU also has new starters at other key positions including quarterback, tailback, tight end, receiver, offensive line and defensive line. But who could have guessed that Colorado would begin play in an improved Pac-12 without one victory?

"The only thing we've been consistent in is that we're inconsistent," said Colorado junior offensive tackle David Bakhtiari, who was referring to the offense but he could have been speaking about the entire team.

Colorado's defense yielded home-run scores of 97 yards (pass) and 94 yards (run) in the 69-14 disaster at Fresno State last weekend and must at least force opponents to work for touchdowns. But this much is clear: The Buffs' offense had better produce at least 30 points on any given Saturday for Colorado to have a chance in the Pac-12 Conference.

To that end, CU quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer said the offense has been simplified.

"Typically, when you get in this situation, you pare things back so you do less things but do them well," Scherer said after a practice this week. "We're using a lot of young guys that haven't played a whole lot. But because they're smart players, maybe as a staff you put too much offense in (too early). I think we may have done that."

Another change: Eric Bieniemy, the offensive coordinator and running backs coach, will work from the sideline during games rather than in the coaches box. Scherer will remain upstairs and aid in the play-calling.

Colorado coach Jon Embree said the reason for the move is two-fold. While on the sideline, Bieniemy can look in the eyes of players and get a pulse on what they're feeling and seeing. And yes, the excitable Bieniemy can offer some, um, encouragement when he is unhappy how things are going.

"He'll get in your face. That's what his personality is," CU backup quarterback Connor Wood said. "We've got a lot of young guys that get down on themselves after one bad play. Coach Bieniemy can help guys understand that you

can't worry about what just happened. You have to get back out there and fight back."

With Bieniemy around, there will be no sulking, no feeling sorry for one's self, Bakhtiari said.

"He's a fiery coach, and I have tremendous respect for the man," Bakhtiari said. "You never want to be on the wrong side of him. The young guys will be too scared to put their heads down. He'll make them keep grinding."

Bieniemy, a two-time All-American as a CU running back more than two decades ago, said "there's nothing like stepping on the field" when asked about the change. "I just want to get caught up in the atmosphere and have some fun."

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

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Washington State's Leach wary that Colorado will "emerge"

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

SPOKANE, WASH. — An article in Friday's edition of the Spokane (Wash.) Spokesman-Review quotes Washington State coach Mike Leach being impressed with the potential of winless Colorado.

Washington State (2-1) hosts Colorado (0-3) Saturday in a 2 p.m. Pac-12 opener (telecast: FX) in Pullman, Wash.

"They're playing out there with a bunch of young guys," Leach said of the Buffaloes. "I think we're similar teams from the standpoint that we don't quite have a tent over our circus right now.

"They (Colorado) definitely have some resources. I do think they're going to emerge and explode at some point because they are very talented."

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

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The Seattle Times

Winner of a 2012 Pulitzer Prize

Cougars

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WSU vs. Colorado game at a glance

WSU matchup box

Washington State (2-1, 0-0 Pac-12), Colorado (0-3, 0-0)

Time: 1 p.m. at Martin Stadium

TV: FX Radio: ESPN (710 AM) **The line:** Washington State by 20

The setup: Colorado seeks its first victory after one of its worst starts in history. The Cougars attempt to get their third consecutive victory, something they haven't done since 2006.

What to expect: Colorado will try to ease pressure on quarterback Jordan Webb and Connor Wood by running true freshman Christian Powell, who has 199 yards rushing. CU is giving up 68 percent passing by opponents, so the Cougars will try to punish Buffs through the air early and often. Connor Halliday appears the likely starter at QB, as he has taken the majority of practice snaps with the first unit as Jeff Tuel continues his recovery from a knee injury.

Key matchup: Webb vs. WSU cornerbacks Damante Horton and Nolan Washington — Colorado has completed only 47 percent of its passes. Meanwhile, WSU coach Mike Leach has been challenging the secondary, which played poorly last week against UNLV.

Notes: It's CU's first trip to Pullman, as it was scheduled to play there Sept. 15, 2001 before 9/11 terrorism wiped it off the schedule and it was played instead in 2004 at then-Qwest Field. ... Buffs get CB Greg Henderson, a starter last year, back from an ankle sprain. He was victimized on Marquess Wilson's 63-yard catch for the winning score with 1:10 left in Boulder in 2011 in WSU's 31-27 victory. ... Of second-year FBS coaches, CU's Jon Embree is the only one with an 0-3 record, and he's been criticized by many after a 69-14 defeat at Fresno State in which the Buffs fell behind 35-0 after one quarter. ... Wilson, who has had an inconsistent start to 2012, is 145 yards from Brandon Gibson's WSU career receiving-yards record of 2,756. ... CU leads the series 4-3.

Injuries: Colorado — C Brad Cotner (toe), S Ray Polk (ankle), LB Doug Rippy (knee), out; CB Greg Henderson (ankle), probable. WSU — QB Jeff Tuel (knee), questionable; slot Rickey Galvin (arm), out.

Upset brewing? WSU has been inconsistent, but Colorado has been downright bad so far, and the young Buffs' confidence has to be lacking.

Prediction: Washington State 38, Colorado 14.

Bud Withers



Cougars big favorites against reeling Colorado

By Howie Stalwick

Friday, September 21, 2012

PULLMAN — The Colorado Buffaloes suffered narrow defeats in their first two football games after blowing halftime leads, and coach Jon Embree was quick to identify part of the problem.

"We have to continue to learn how to finish," Embree said.

The coach's message must have confused the ultra-young Buffaloes. Apparently convinced that Embree thought they were peaking too early in games, the Buffs promptly went out and fell behind 48-0 in the first half of a 69-14 loss at Fresno State last week.

The 2-1 Washington State Cougars find themselves in the rare position of being 20-point favorites when 0-3 Colorado visits Martin Stadium Saturday for WSU's homecoming game. It's the Pacific-12 Conference opener for both teams.

Embree, a former Colorado star who was a popular choice to replace ex-Boise State coach Dan Hawkins after the 2010 season, already has people calling for his head.

Earlier this week, former Colorado and NFL player Matt McChesney labeled the Buffaloes "a disgrace" on his Denver radio show. McChesney said the Buffaloes are "the worst in the nation" and called for the firing of defensive coordinator Greg Brown, and he now questions his decision to support the hiring of Embree.

CBSSports.com ranks Colorado 120th out of 124 teams in the Football Bowl Subdivision (WSU is 86th). Simply put, the Buffaloes appear to be lacking at almost every position.

The Cougars, of course, were in a similar position not so long ago. Now they're trying to win a third straight game and sell out a second straight home game for the first time since 2006.

A victory would push the Cougars halfway to their goal of qualifying for a bowl game for the first time since 2003. Of course, the Cougars were 3-1 last year after opening Pac-12 play with a 31-27 win at Colorado, then lost seven of their remaining eight games.

Washington State faces a monumental challenge next Saturday against third-ranked Oregon in Seattle (7:30 p.m., ESPN or ESPN2), so every win is essential. The

Cougars appear to have progressed each week, but it could be argued the opposition has grown steadily weaker.

WSU coach Mike Leach and his players constantly talk about the need to get physically and mentally "tougher." Unfortunately for the Cougars, they have limitations due to youth, inexperience and the sheer lack of talent and/or depth at some positions.

The Cougars do have talent and depth at quarterback and wide receiver. However, quarterback Connor Halliday is expected to make just his third college start with Jeff Tuel still nursing a knee injury, and starting slot receiver Rickey Galvin is apparently out indefinitely with an arm injury suffered last week at UNLV. The Cougars do not disclose injury information.

The Cougars remain without former starting offensive guard-tackle Dan Speltz, who has been absent for two weeks due to "personal issues," Leach said. Redshirt freshman Gunnar Eklund made his first start last week — he played left tackle, with former North Mason High School standout John Fullington shifting to left guard — and Eklund looked solid.

"He played real, real well," Leach said.

Halliday received better protection than Tuel did in the first two games. Center Elliott Bosch said it was the offensive line's "best game," but he echoes Eklund and Leach when he says the Cougars need to finish games stronger. Eastern Washington and UNLV scored late to make the past two games close.

"We just need to kind of play within ourselves," Bosch said. "Stay confident to be able to do our jobs late in the game rather than kind of feel the pressure."

"We just have to learn how to finish," Eklund said, "and how to win and how to keep the foot on someone's throat."



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