



*CU quarterback Jordan Webb says Buffs need to establish a home-field edge.
Photo Courtesy: Associated Press*



Brooks: Buffs Don't Want Label Of 'One-Win Wonders'

Release: 09/28/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - Far weightier questions were asked on the Colorado campus this week, but this one targeting the school's football program was plenty heavy: "Are the Buffs one-and-done?" In fact, when coach Jon Embree gathered his players around him following Wednesday's practice, his remarks included another couple of queries: "Are you satisfied with one win? Is that who you are?"

The Buffs swear it isn't, and it's difficult to imagine that euphoria over the season's first victory - a 35-34 comeback thriller last weekend at Washington State - could cloud a 1-3 team's perspective for Saturday's Pac-12 Conference home opener against UCLA (4 p.m., Folsom Field, Pac-12 Network).

Nonetheless, Embree was wary of it at mid-week. But his players promised their first win after three frightful losses had been filed away and their full focus was on the Bruins.

"Losing hurts more than anything; this can't be a one-win season," junior linebacker Paul Vigo said. "Some people outside the program expect that - one win, two wins . . . that's motivation for us to get more. That's how

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everybody on the team has to see it. That feeling of winning, that excitement in us - that's something we want to have on-going in this program."

Asked if it was premature to say a corner had been turned last weekend at Wazzu, senior linebacker Jon Major answered, "No," then added, "But we're really going to have to play a lot better than we have because the competition gets ten-fold better."

UCLA is CU's most talented opponent to date. Embree reminded his team that the Bruins (3-1, 0-1) were a Top 25 team (No. 19) before last weekend's 27-20 home loss against Oregon State. UCLA entered the national rankings (No. 22) in Week Three following its 36-30 win against then-No. 17 Nebraska and climbed three positions after a 37-6 rout of Houston. The loss to Oregon State, which opened with a 10-7 win against then-No. 13 Wisconsin, showed UCLA the poll exit.

At his weekly press conference, Embree good naturedly took exception when the first question about UCLA concerned the Bruins' running game. Shuffling players into more suitable positions and overall defensive improvement in a new 3-4 scheme, Embree said, has keyed the early rise under first-year coach Jim Mora, Jr.

"UCLA, it's about their defense, their defense creates a lot of opportunities for their offense," Embree said. "So our offense has to do a good job of converting third downs and when we get opportunities to get points, you are getting touchdowns not field goals."

Statistics can deceive, but the Bruins' defensive stats aren't nearly as gaudy as those on offense. UCLA ranks No. 8 in the Pac-12 - two places above CU - in total defense, allowing 421.5 yards a game. But the Bruins are first in the conference in total offense at 577.5 yards a game, and of that total, 251.5 yards are gained on the ground. That places UCLA behind only Oregon (303.8) in Pac-12 rushing.

UCLA features the conference's leading rusher - Jonathan "Jet Ski" Franklin, who pounded the Buffs for 162 yards and a touchdown in a 45-6 Bruins win last season and is averaging 146.5 yards this fall.

The Buffs didn't miss many tackles last weekend, and Major - he leads CU with 8.8 a game - and Vigo said repeating that against Franklin and the Bruins is critical.

"It's going to be real important to get him on the ground; he's explosive in cutting back, changing directions," Vigo said. "We just have to stop the run and make plays on the ball. That's going to be our game plan, really. It starts with effort, everybody running to the ball. That has to be our identity. Coach knows that's what it took for us to win that game (last Saturday)."

A former safety, Vigo moved to the "Will" linebacker spot last spring. Against WSU, he made a career-best nine tackles (two for losses and one to save a TD). He also forced a fumble and broke up a pass. Of his new position, he said, "I love it a lot. The coaches have a lot of trust in me there, so that's the one thing I've got going for me. On top of that, it's 'see ball, get ball' most of the time. And I'm comfortable with that, you know? It's about making plays with effort. I just want to help out the team as best I can."

Vigo's hope is that CU can corral the 5-11, 195-pound Franklin like Oregon State did last week, holding him to 45 yards - or 135 below his average for the first three games. Embree said duplicating whatever the Beavers did schematically against the Bruins might not be feasible for the Buffs: "I think sometimes fans, or people, get the mistake of, 'Well, if they did it then, you can do it.' If it's not within your scheme, it's sometimes hard to get some things taught or to try to do things if it doesn't fit with what the background with whatever your basis is for your scheme."

"I thought the key in that game was Oregon State's front did a really good job of tackling when they had opportunities to make plays and that's what you have to do because if not, he will take a 2-yard loss and make it an 80-yard touchdown."

The Buffs, noted Major, need to "try to pick and choose from all the good things (Oregon State) did" and try to

emulate those. He also believes CU's defensive front matches up well with UCLA's offensive line, which started three freshmen (two were redshirt freshmen) last week. "We just have to put together a good game like (OSU) did," Major said. "They've got a lot of speed on their defense and they used a different from what (UCLA) had been seeing."

But the Bruins' offense is more than Franklin. Quarterback Brett Hundley is third in the Pac-12 in passing (299.8 yards a game) and passing efficiency (152.0 rating) and second in total offense (337.5 yards). And UCLA's receiving corps will be the best the Buffs have faced.

Embree, who spent time as an assistant at UCLA under Karl Dorrell, said the 6-3, 223-pound Hundley "is getting better each game . . . each game you can see him gaining more confidence and getting better - just like I see it in our younger players. It's good to see him doing well. He's a great kid; I know him a little bit, and his father. I just don't want him to have success this week; then he can pick it back up."

CU quarterback Jordan Webb had his best game as a Buff last weekend, accounting for four touchdowns (two running, two passing). Webb completed 29-of-42 passes for 345 yards (one interception) and ran 4 yards for the tying touchdown in the final 9 seconds. Will Oliver's extra point pushed CU ahead by one and completed the largest fourth-quarter comeback on the road in school history.

The Buffs were 1-4 at Folsom Field last season and are 0-1 at home this season. Webb said that has to change: "You want to be good at home. I think that's everybody goal . . . win every home game. I think players being confident on their home field is huge. We want to really take it to heart this week."

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Young Buffs prone to giving up big plays, lots of points

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

From Day One of his tenure as head coach at Colorado, Jon Embree has talked about building a program where players live and die for one another and play that way on Saturdays.

Embree understood that even with the strong recruiting abilities of the staff he assembled, it would be awhile before CU would be able to compete for the very best recruits. After all the Buffs hadn't had a winning season in five years -- now six -- and the best talent doesn't just start flowing into a program with that kind of track record.

"We won't have the better players, so we have to be the better team," Embree says.

The 1-3 Buffs are coming off a dramatic come-from-behind win at Washington State a week ago. It was one of only a few times since Embree took over the Buffs have hung together through four quarters of football just as he envisioned.

"I thought last week our guys never blinked," Embree said. "They did everything we asked them to do, and the resolve they had -- I talked about that last Tuesday about the resolve of this team. I can't put my finger on it, but there is just something about this group of guys that they really do believe and they really are trying to do it."

Embree expects to see it more as the young players he has recruited begin to grow up and he will need to see it more if the Buffs are going to give themselves any realistic shot at winning through much of the final two months of the season. Beginning Saturday at Folsom Field against UCLA (4:07 p.m. Pac-12 Network), the Buffs can expect to be outmatched in terms of pure talent in almost every remaining game on the schedule.

The Buffs face a 3-1 UCLA team coming off its first loss last week at home to Oregon State. The Bruins are loaded with weapons on offense but driven by defense.

"UCLA, it's about their defense, their defense creates a lot of opportunities for their offense," Embree said. "So our offense has to do a good job of converting third downs and when we get opportunities to get points, you are getting touchdowns not field goals."

The Colorado offense led by quarterback Jordan Webb came through with its best 15 minutes of football so far this season in the fourth quarter last week, scoring three touchdowns and racking up more than 250 yards of total offense, including two plays of 70 yards or more.

The Buffs have gone entire games in recent years without that kind of offensive production.

Doing it against perennial Pac-12 North Division doormat Washington State is one thing, but moving the ball and scoring points against the Bruins would mark another step forward.

There figures to be pressure on the CU offense to play at a high level once again because the defense continues to give up big plays and a lot of points. Each of the past three opponents has scored at least 30 points against the Buffs.

CU, which is using a lot of freshmen and sophomores on defense, is last in the Pac-12 in scoring defense and next to last in total defense.

They face a UCLA offense led by redshirt freshman quarterback Brett Hundley, a dual-threat playmaker who is second in the conference in total offense.

Hundley has a slew of experienced playmakers to distribute the ball to, including the conference's leading rusher in tailback Johnathan Franklin, who is averaging nearly 8 yards a carry and 147 yards per game.

In the passing game, CU has to account for speedy wide receiver Shaq Evans and tight end Joseph Fauria, the nephew of former CU tight end Christian Fauria.

The Bruins lead the league in total offense, gaining 577 yards per game, despite being last in the league in third-down conversions. That means they're making a lot of big plays, which doesn't bode well for a CU defense that has surrendered 25 plays of 20 yards or more and nine plays of 35 yards or more in just four games.

UCLA looks like the better team. The challenge for Colorado, once again, is playing better as a team.

Follow Kyle on Twitter: @KyleRingo

Thorburn: Perfection not necessary, but digging a big hole again a bad idea for CU Buffs

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

Buffzone.com

The Buffs finally enjoyed a feel-good Hollywood ending.

Down by 17 points, Colorado scored three late touchdowns to pull out a dramatic 35-34 victory last Saturday at Washington State.

After finishing 0-3 against a weak nonconference schedule, Jon Embree's team flew home from Pullman, Wash., tied for first place in the powerful Pac-12.

Forgotten during the fight song celebration was 0-4 flashing before Nick Kasa's eyes.

On CU's game-winning drive, Christian Powell fumbled the ball on first-and-goal at the 7-yard line. It appeared that Washington State was going to recover the loose ball and the Buffs would have their hearts ripped out again.

"I just turned around and saw (Powell) fumble and actually saw one of their guys kind of belly flop on it," Kasa recalled. "He kind of landed on the ball wrong and it popped out, like right in front of me.

"So I dove on it myself and just ripped it away from him."

Kasa's save allowed Jordan Webb to end a personal 13-game losing streak as a starting quarterback.

The Kansas transfer ran for a touchdown on fourth-and goal with nine seconds left. Will Oliver tacked on the extra (exclamation) point.

An Associated Press photo of the score shows the football slipping out of Webb's hands as he prepares to cross the goal line.

Another disaster averted?

"That was definitely a split-second thing," Webb said when I asked him about the image. "I don't think it was very close to coming out. It was a pretty funny picture. I'm sure I'll be hearing about that for awhile."

It would not have been amusing in the visiting locker room at Martin Stadium if Powell or Webb would have lost fumbles while running in for the team's elusive first victory of the season.

And it would have been extremely difficult for the Buffs to recover from the agony of such a defeat.

"It would have been pretty messed up if we didn't get that ball," Kasa said.

The lesson from the greatest fourth quarter road comeback in program history is simple:

The Buffs don't have to be perfect to win. They just have to find a way to be one-point better than the other team on any given Saturday.

"We just have to play 60 minutes of football," offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said. "If we do that, I like our

The Buffs fumbled four times against Washington State, losing two of them.

Tyler McCulloch's fumble in the second quarter led to a touchdown that gave the Cougars a 21-7 lead. Webb lost a fumble while getting sacked in the second quarter, but the turnover didn't lead to any further damage on the scoreboard.

Webb fumbled again in the fourth quarter. Left tackle David Baktiari recovered at CU's 36, which allowed Darragh O'Neill to flip the field with a punt down to the Washington State 21.

On the way to Pac-12 offensive player of the week honors, Webb also threw two interceptions. The first pick in the third quarter set up a Washington State touchdown that made the score 28-14.

The unflappable junior signal caller started the comeback with a 70-yard touchdown pass to Kasa. Tony Jones broke off an 84-yard touchdown run on a hand off from Nick Hirschman after Webb had the wind knocked out of him.

"Winning that game and in the manner we did, also teaches them how hard it is to win," Embree said. "It is hard to win, because there are things that happen that are not in your control. Your ability to let that go and focus on the next play is huge."

Oliver missed a 30-yard field goal attempt that would have given CU a 10-7 lead in the first quarter.

Josh Ford was called for unsportsmanlike conduct after Jones' touchdown, which forced CU to kickoff from its own 20. After a 56-yard return, the Buffs' defense held Washington State to a field goal to keep the visitors within six.

Kasa said he was fortunate to avoid a taunting penalty.

"On my touchdown I was celebrating a little bit early and that could have been bad if they would have made that call at the 10-yard line when I put my hands up," Kasa said. "We had a few other celebration penalties, and I think we need to just tone it down a little bit and eliminate the mental errors."

CU's young team and even veteran leaders such as senior linebacker Jon Major have admitted that they were trying too hard at times early in the season.

That led to costly mistakes in humbling losses to Colorado State, Sacramento State and Fresno State.

The Buffs don't have to be flawless today to beat UCLA at Folsom Field, but they can't make nearly as many mistakes as they did last Saturday and expect to win.

Waiting for a dramatic fourth-quarter finish probably isn't a good idea either.

"We have to play our best game against UCLA," Bieniemy said. "But hopefully we've learned our lesson that we don't have to play perfect to win."

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

Colorado's Bieniemy effective in motivating from sideline

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado players already may be calling it "The E.B. effect."

This much is certain: When offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy is down on the sideline for a game, as he was for the first time this season last weekend during the comeback victory over Washington State, everybody knows it.

Offensive players, defensive players, it didn't matter. Even several steps away, they can hear him.

And what's really amazing is that, while Bieniemy lost his voice weeks ago, he still manages to scream.

"He was loud," sophomore tailback Tony Jones said of the Washington State game. "There's definitely emotion. He kept saying, 'It ain't the end of the game yet, so let's keep fighting!' "

The decibel level will be turned up again Saturday when Colorado (1-3, 1-0 Pac-12) faces UCLA (3-1, 0-1) in a 4 p.m. game (Pac-12 Network) at Folsom Field.

"It's easy to say that it worked out great with Coach Bieniemy down on the sideline last week, because we got the win," sophomore receiver Tyler McCulloch said. "But even during pregame (warm-ups), you could tell how much energy he was bringing. It affected everyone."

McCulloch said Bieniemy being down on the sideline meant everything to him, especially in overcoming adversity early in the game. On Colorado's first possession of the second quarter, McCulloch caught a sideline pass from quarterback Jordan Webb but was stripped of the ball. Washington State recovered.

McCulloch, a possession-type receiver from Albuquerque who is known for his sure hands, said that was the first time he had ever lost a fumble, including youth leagues.

"I came off the field mad at myself and E.B. could tell that," McCulloch recalled. "He got in my face. It wasn't anger. He didn't degrade me or anything. He just said: 'Stay up, stay up. The ball is going to come back to you. So be ready.'"

"Just to have some encouragement like that is huge for a player," McCulloch added. "Having a guy like E.B. down on the field, you know you're never going to be able to slack off or hang your head. It's just awesome having him down there with us."

Bieniemy, an All-American on Colorado's 1990 national championship team, worked the first three games of the season from the coaches box, sitting next to quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer.

As coordinator, Bieniemy retains play-calling responsibilities while being down on the sideline. But he is in constant communication with Scherer via headsets.

Scherer, who coached NFL quarterbacks including those at Carolina under current Broncos coach John Fox, said he offers his thoughts and observations to Bieniemy prior to each CU possession.

"Eric is still the play caller, and I'm there to make suggestions," Scherer said. "I'm real sensitive to not make suggestions between plays. Now, if there was something I felt real strongly about, say, after second down, I might

say, 'Eric, on third down, let's think about this.'

"It's between series when I give him all my thoughts. We'll talk about the game plan and I might say, 'Don't forget about this call, don't forget about that call.' "

Conversely, Bieniemy might ask for Scherer's advice before making a play call. Scherer said they did not take it personally when opinions differed.

Being within arm's reach of the players, Bieniemy was able to gauge the emotions of the team. Scherer said he didn't need any of that information when suggesting play calls. But even from upstairs, Scherer said he could tell that Bieniemy had a positive influence.

"I thought Eric did a great job of pulling the whole team together," Scherer said, "whether it was after a good play or bad play, or after a good series or bad series. Eric and I talked, and then he'd tell the guys, 'This is what we're going to do for the next series.'

"That way they could collectively think about the next series without going through a third party like a position coach. Then it would separate from there, into whatever individual adjustments needed to be made with the other coaches."

After the win at Washington State, Bieniemy said the coordination with Scherer went smoothly. And, Bieniemy added, the comeback victory by the Buffs had nothing to do with him being on the sideline.

Don't believe a word of that, CU players insisted.

"E.B. was a powerful presence down there," Webb said. "He brought a lot of emotion. He brought a lot of motivation. To me, that was the difference in the game."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280, tkensler@denverpost.com or twitter.com/tomkensler

The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

SEPTEMBER 28, 2012, 9:27 AM

Colorado football has one in bag, but difficult schedule ahead

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

Great start in Pac-12 play for Colorado, recovering from embarrassing nonconference losses to mount a fourth-quarter comeback last weekend and overtake Washington State 35-34 in Pullman, Wash.

Whether the Buffs (1-3, 1-0 Pac-12) can bag more conference wins remains to be seen. As things stand now, Colorado would be the underdog in every game remaining on its schedule.

Consider this: None of Colorado's eight remaining scheduled opponents has a losing record:

In order, they are:

3-1 UCLA
3-1 Arizona State
3-1 Southern California
4-0 Oregon
3-0 Stanford
3-1 Arizona
2-1 Washington
2-2 Utah

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

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KVAL 13 - Eugene, Oregon

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Can Buffs handle a win as well as they did defeat?

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By Associated Press September 28, 2012

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — The Colorado Buffaloes were able to deal with the disappointment of a blowout loss at Fresno State to rally past Washington State 35-34 with a last-minute win in their Pac-12 opener last week.

Now, they'll see if they can handle the highs of victory as well as they did the lows of defeat.

The Buffaloes (1-3) host UCLA (3-1, 0-1) Saturday at Folsom Field, where Colorado was stunned 30-28 by Sacramento State, an FCS-level program, earlier this month.

"They say losses linger with you a lot longer, but I think for a young team, a win can do that," said Buffaloes quarterback Jordan Webb, who was named the league's offensive player of the week. "We're feeling confident, hopefully not cocky, I don't think that's the way we're wired, I don't think any of us are like that, so that shouldn't be a problem.

"We'll have to put it behind us. It won't matter on Saturday whether we had won or lost the Saturday previous, so we're just going to have to go out there and give it our best shot."

The Bruins are coming off a 27-20 loss to now-No. 18 Oregon State after impressive wins over Rice, Houston and Nebraska.

The Buffaloes, whose running game got a boost with the return of Tony Jones last week, were starting to hear chatter that they were the worst team in the program's history after losses to Sac State and Mountain West Conference members Colorado State and Fresno State, the latter by a 69-14 score, after entering the season with hopes of going 3-0 before conference play began.

Colorado coach Jon Embree shook things up last week by having offensive coordinator

Eric Bieniemy move down from the booth onto the sideline and showing his players a motivational film featuring former Buffs.

The Buffs fell behind 31-14 last week but scored three TDs in the final seven minutes, including Webb's short TD run with nine seconds left.

"We played with energy the entire game, which is something that we haven't done, that we hadn't been consistent with," Webb said. "The whole time we all kept our heads up."

And just where did that energy and enthusiasm come from?

"It was definitely a combination of a lot of things, having E.B. on the sideline that's one of them, he's a high-energy guy," Webb said. "I think during our pregame routine, we really got the energy going, doing little chants, stuff like that. But a lot of it started with the video we watched on Friday. Just hearing from the former players, how important it was to get to sing that fight song. I think that made everybody want to sing it just that much more.

"Then it was a great feeling getting to sing that after the game."

Webb's game-winning score was immortalized in an Associated Press photo that showed the ball about to come loose from his grasp as he crossed the goal line with the clock winding down.

"That was definitely a split-second thing, I don't think it was close to coming out," Webb said. "It was a pretty funny picture, I'm sure I'll be hearing about that for a while."

What the Buffs don't want to hear about anymore is how historically bad they are. Winning as they did on the road should quiet the critics, at least for a while.

It also gave the Buffs something to hold onto, star defensive lineman Will Pericak said.

"It definitely gives you more confidence like yes, we can do this. We're not so far away from winning, it's just those little details, the ball bouncing one way or another," Pericak said. "I think it definitely adds confidence to us ... so I feel like that win will help us."

The Buffs know they'll need more than just confidence to upset the Bruins.

Embree said that just like quarterback Brett Hundley, Bruins running back Jonathan

"Jet Ski" Franklin presents a big challenge for his young team.

"I think he has a chance to be the all-time leading rusher there before it is all said and done," Embree said. "He is explosive, he runs with power, and he has a lot of speed."

The Bruins' defense, led by linemen Datone Jones and Cassius Marsh and linebacker Anthony Barr, a converted running back, concerns Embree just as much as their ground game, however.

"UCLA, it's about their defense," Embree said.

Odds makers installed the Bruins as a nearly three-touchdown favorite — all the more reason the Buffs have to make sure their big win last week is in their rearview mirror.

That doesn't mean it won't have lasting effects.

"There are a lot of demands put on them, and to put those demands on them and have nothing to show for it can be demoralizing," Embree said. "They have been good at being disappointed, but not discouraged, because discouragement leads to failure, discouragement leads to quitting, discouragement leads to a lot of bad things.

"Disappointment, if handled right, can be fuel to use to get better, the fuel to work harder, and that is what they have done."



Pac-12 football: Colorado Buffaloes hold heads high after beating Washington State

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Paul Buker, The Oregonian
By

*"This is a miserable team. They are bad, they show no heart, they play without passion and no matter who they put out there, they stink. It's only going to get worse." -- **The Ralphie Report**, a Buffaloes blog, shortly after Colorado's 69-14 home loss to Fresno State.*

Nick Kasa, Colorado's 260-pound tight end, said there was no place to hide in Boulder after what happened against Fresno State.

The Buffaloes had an oh-no and three record.

They were a national laughingstock, ridiculed and kicked around all week as perhaps the worst team in the history of the conference.

Outraged fans wanted to fire the coach, the athletic director and the school chancellor, not necessarily in that order.

The players bunkered up, ignoring newspapers, radio and TV.

Life at the bottom was miserable, but there were more games to play and coach Jon Embree tried to stay positive amid all of the Buffs bashing.

"It was pretty tough," Kasa said. "I was expecting it, I guess. We got a hard time about it. And there's



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The Associated Press

Quarterback Jordan Webb and the Buffaloes came from behind to beat Washington State 35-34.

always those people who walk around, and you can see them whispering about you."

Then a crazy thing happened to the team that many pundits had jokingly ranked 13th in their Pac-12 power polls.

Lowly Colorado, a 20-point underdog at Washington State (no power in its own right), rallied from 17 points down in the fourth quarter to **shock the Cougars 35-34** in Pullman.

It was man bites dog.

Kasa said that when quarterback Jordan Webb walked in to score on a draw play with nine seconds left, "I haven't felt anything like that in awhile. Maybe ever. ... it was pretty awesome."

Kasa felt something else, too. "You couldn't see it on film, because we were all running routes to set up the draw, but both my calves cramped up. I was trying to crawl over to celebrate."

Colorado, after its horrible start, wasn't expected to win another game.

The Buffaloes' miracle comeback took shape when Kasa -- a converted defensive end playing his fifth game at tight end -- somehow outran the WSU secondary on a 70-yard touchdown pass.

"I was trying hard not to get caught," he said.

The Cougars should have known something was in the air. Kasa hadn't scored a touchdown since middle school, although he did score once in high school JV ball.

"Everybody just kept their nose down," Kasa said. "We were not going to give up on the game. We knew anything could happen. Even when we got (behind 17 points in the fourth quarter) there was nobody on the sideline saying, 'It's over.'"

Said Embree: "We got a couple stops, then our offense started clicking. That long pass kind of jumpstarted some stuff."

After tailback Tony Jones scored untouched on an 84-yard run, the embattled Buffaloes were like a pack of ravenous dogs. They made up their minds they weren't going to lose.

Which raised the question, what got into these guys?

Kasa pointed to the video everyone watched in the days before the WSU game. Former Buffaloes players provided the inspiration in the video, letting Embree's team know what it means to put on the Colorado uniform.

"They told us to keep our heads up, that they had been the same situation and pulled out of it," Kasa said. "They said they were behind us no matter how bad it got. They just kind of conveyed the pride that comes with being in this program. We didn't want to let them down. We wanted to uphold that tradition, especially for them."

It was a bit of genius on Embree's part. He also met with each player individually during the week to get his message across. The season wasn't over. No one was going to give up on his watch.

The video clinched it.

"I think it played a huge role," Webb said. "It gave me chills."

Embree said there was "a lot of resolve" on the sideline.

"Everyone believed they could win," he said.

All of which makes Colorado a dangerous opponent for UCLA on Saturday.

Once again, the Buffaloes are 20-point underdogs.

Embree might need to pull out a second video if he wants to coax another victory out of a shockingly young squad that has 10 freshmen and sophomores in the starting lineup.

It's more likely Colorado will just feed off its momentum. The game is in Boulder, and the same students who dumped on the players before the WSU game will be cheering Saturday if the Buffaloes give the Bruins trouble.

"It's going to be a tough game, everybody knows that," Kasa said. "But we're going to try to keep going what we've got going."

UCLA coach Jim Mora, still stinging from the physical beating the Bruins took against Oregon State, figures he's in no position to overlook anybody. Even "the worst team in the history of the conference."

"When they mounted that comeback in the fourth quarter, you could just see confidence in what they were doing growing," Mora said. "They showed a ton of heart and great character."

Kasa said he could walk around campus Monday and not feel like there was a target on his back.

"Definitely a lot better feeling," he said. "That's for sure."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL: UCLA hopes to avoid getting tangled up in Colorado

Webb

By Miguel A. Melendez, Correspondent Inside SOCAL

Posted:

sgvtribune.com

When UCLA coach Jim Mora sat down to watch tape on Colorado, he specifically kept a close eye on Buffaloes quarterback Jordan Webb.

Webb had shaky performances in losses to Colorado State, Sacramento State and Fresno State. In the latter game he threw for only 85 yards and completed went just 5 of 13 with two interceptions.

To say Webb, a junior, bounced back nicely last week would be an understatement. Webb led the Buffaloes (1-3, 1-0) to a 35-34 win at Washington State after they trailed by as many as 17 points midway through the fourth quarter. He finished with 345 yards and two touchdowns on 29-of-42 passing en route to Pac-12 Offensive Player of the Week honors.

Just last week, UCLA (3-1, 0-1) struggled against a quarterback with similar numbers, pedigree and accolades.

Webb, like Oregon State's Sean Mannion who ripped the Bruins secondary with 379 yards, is a threat in the pocket and on the run. Mannion had little to show going into the Beavers' game against the Bruins, but Webb has a solid footing and one UCLA won't take lightly when the teams meet today at Folsom Field.

"He's elusive," Mora said about Webb. "He throws well on the run to his left, which isn't easy to do. He's a guy that when he gets out of the pocket he remains a passer. You'll see quarterbacks as soon as they get out of the pocket they tuck the ball. So that's an indication to your secondary that we can come out of coverage and pursue this quarterback."

Colorado's competitive spirit also caught Mora's attention, especially since the Buffaloes were on the road.

"It's exponentially more difficult to fight back on the road the way they were down and get a win," Mora said. "That was really impressive to me. It says a lot about the character of the kids and their coaching staff."

UCLA's secondary struggled against Oregon State's top two receivers. Colorado's Nelson Spruce (eight catches, 103 yards) - a former Westlake receiver - and Nick Kasa (three catches, 87 yards) burned Washington State last week in spread formations.

"This guy keeps it in his hand and he keeps his eyes down the field and remains a threat to throw the ball," Mora said about Webb. "And that makes it hard, plus he's accurate on the run. I saw him throw a couple across his body when he was moving to his left. He plays with a lot of confidence and he's not easy to get down. He's slippery back there."

UCLA is an overwhelming favorite, but so was Washington State. The Bruins also are appearing in their first road game since the Aug. 30 opener against Rice in Houston, but the challenges don't end there.

Colorado has a potent ground attack led by true freshman Christian Powell, a former Upland High standout who is 6 feet and 235 pounds. He rushed for 147 yards and three touchdowns on 28 carries against Sacramento State.

Mora knows how good Powell can be. Mora recruited him.

"He's a good player for a freshman," Mora said. "You're gonna have to gang-tackle him. He'll break tackles."

Mora said the Bruins' tackling last week wasn't up to par, which is why they emphasized fundamentals and pursuit during practice. UCLA gave up three big plays that led to long touchdowns last week.

The Bruins will have a tougher challenge without linebacker Jordan Zumwalt, who did not travel with the team as he recovers from a scooter accident. Damien Holmes could move outside to fill his role.

The Bruins need to find the rhythm with which their offense flowed in the first two games of the season that saw running back Johnathan Franklin enjoy career days. But the senior was limited to just 45 yards on 12 carries against Oregon State.

The return of Jeff Baca at right guard will help take off some of the pressure from UCLA's young offensive line.

His ability to pick up blitzes will be key to quarterback Brett Hundley not spending a lot of time on his back or being flushed out of the pocket too much, as was the case last week.

Colorado's total defense ranks 103rd in the nation. The Buffaloes are giving up nearly 40 points a game, which won't bode well considering they'll face the nation's best freshman quarterback in Hundley.

JILL PAINTER: Colorado remains where Ralphie the Buffalo roams

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BOULDER, Colo. - "Here comes Ralphie!"

It's the popular phrase used to kick off Colorado football games: the running of the buffalo.

Folsom Field played host to an important practice late Friday afternoon under clear blue skies, with a ray of light shining through the stadium onto the star, Ralphie - a 5-year-old female.

She did her thing by running around the field under the guidance of her student-athlete handlers.

They abide by all the same rules as UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley.

The running of Ralphie, such a longtime tradition that this is Ralphie V, runs 25 mph or just below 4.0 seconds in the 40-yard dash, as ESPN once clocked her. She's way faster than any football player.

From the time her gate opens until the time she sprints into her trailer, it's 40 seconds.

Her Colorado team is 1-3 and hosts UCLA (3-1) today, but she's always breathtaking as she runs her 1,400-pound self around the field before the game and right before the start of the second half.

After her first run Friday in front of some family, friends, her team and recruits, she gobbled up all the attention.

"That was a good run, baby," cooed Stephanie Herriage, a California native who is one of two females on the Ralphie handlers' team, as she scratched Ralphie's chin.

Yes, girls can run the buffalo, too.

When the gate opened, her handlers had the leads and went along for the ride. They're fast, but not that fast. Ralphie pulls them along to keep up with her.

She arrived to practice in her new luxury trailer, a vehicle with rubber mats and sides everyone says she loves. The trailer was the result of a fundraising effort for three years. But John Graves, the assistant director of the Ralphie Program, won't reveal the price tag.

Ralphie's home, a ranch in Denver, is a secret as well.

Ralphie and all her pregame glory is no secret. She's the highlight of one of college football's most exciting pregame festivities.

"It's a thrill to interact with the buffalo," senior Blake Denley said. "She's a wild animal, and we like to keep her wild so she stays fast, but we're around her a good amount so she's used to it.

"The interaction is great."

Senior Taylor James, the grandson of the late Eddie Crowder, the former Colorado football coach and athletic director, was nervous on his first run as a rookie. He still feels that excitement. It's just different.

"Everything builds up inside you as you're about to run," James said. "The first time I ran in front of 50,000 fans, that feeling just gets you going every time."

Last week, Colorado mounted a historic fourth-quarter comeback to win at Washington State on a last-second, fourth-down play. Ralphie and her handlers are hopeful there's more of that to come this season since the only road games Ralphie could travel to are a Pac-12 Championship and bowl game.

Not.

Going.

To.

Happen.

As Ralphie waited for practice to begin, she wagged her tail, and her handlers say she exhibits some characteristics of a dog.

"She's flirtatious with us," James said with a smile. "When we're cleaning up, she'll come over and try to nudge you with her head to play with you. She wants us to chase her around."

Only if she knows you. It takes a good six months for her to warm up to you. If she recognizes her smell on your gloves, you're a friend for life.

Senior Chris Milinazzo found having "Ralphie handler" on his resume has proved quite fruitful. But a special day with Ralphie at her ranch is his most prized story with the buffalo.

"I was cleaning up by myself and there was a cottonwood tree, and she rips all the leaves and stuff down she can," Milinazzo said. "But then, she put her head in my lap and I was feeding her cotton seeds and she was nudging me to feed her faster."

"The point is everyone makes sees her as a crazy, wild animal. She's like a dog if you're around her a lot. She responds to you."

A videographer from a local television station set up her tripod and expensive camera just outside Ralphie's trailer. When asked to move - as though someone needs to be asked to move when a 1,400-pound animal is about to be unleashed on her workout - the camerawoman did, but just a smidge. Good thing Ralphie's handlers had her on the right track.

Imagine if Ralphie had the same mindset as UCLA coach Jim Mora, who threw a cameraman out of practice earlier this week because he was where he wasn't supposed to be.

Ralphie didn't so much as snort. She did relieve herself on the field, but that's probably not because she figured UCLA would start on that end of the field.

When her handlers talk to her she seems to smile, which is more than you can say for USC coach Lane Kiffin.

She posed for pictures with people behind a little rail, although when two little boys took their turn a mom yelled out: "Don't put your hand in there."

Josh Alderfer is a 29-year-old senior and isn't one of those non-traditional students who doesn't take part in activities. He runs with the buffalo. Never mind he needs to stretch for 29 more minutes than the other handlers.

They all wear hats and black shirts and jeans (provided by Cinch, their sponsor) and Nike shoes.

"She feeds off the crowd," Alderfer said. "You can tell a difference when it's game day versus practice. Anybody whose seen it doesn't have a hard time believing it. You have to see it in person."

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UCLA FOOTBALL

UCLA hopes to level Colorado with reality

Bruins may be coming off a loss, but they're a big favorite against the Buffaloes, who surprisingly are tied for first place in the Pac-12 South after just one conference game.

By Chris Foster

September 29, 2012

BOULDER, Colo. — UCLA lost for the first time last weekend and was bounced from the national college football rankings.

"We're not panicking," wide receiver Shaquelle Evans said.

Colorado fans remain giddy after the Buffaloes rallied for their first victory of the season.

"I've been fortunate to be in some great wins. That one ranks up there," Colorado Coach Jon Embree said.

Where these teams go from there will be clearer Saturday, when the Bruins and Buffaloes have a validation game at Folsom Field.

UCLA (3-1 overall, 0-1 in conference play) lost to Oregon State last Saturday. Lose again and the victory over Nebraska could be relegated to the fluke bin.

Colorado (1-3, 1-0) scored 21 fourth-quarter points in a 35-34 come-from-behind victory at Washington State. That victory, too, may get re-classified if the Buffaloes stumble back to their losing ways.

No one would have predicted a week ago that last-place UCLA would be playing first-place Colorado. And few believe it still. The Bruins are 20-point favorites.

"There's nothing we have to prove," UCLA defensive lineman Datone Jones said.

Except ...

"You don't want to lose two in a row," Evans said. "That's a tough thing to come back from."

The Bruins' three-game winning streak to start the season shot them into the rankings. They reached 19th in the Associated Press media poll before being evicted by Oregon State.

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"This is very important week to make a statement to the Pac-12 that we're here to compete," Evans said.

On the other hand ...

"The biggest thing for us is to not take this as a game where we have to show everybody what we're really made of," safety Dalton Hilliard said.

Those are conflicting views that even Coach Jim Mora finds tricky to balance.

"We try to keep the focus on us, the way we're playing rather than our opponent and what the game means in terms of rankings or bouncing back," Mora said.

Still, Mora sees this game as a big, "for our fan base, to restore any faith we may have lost by losing Saturday." He also sees this as a chance "to get our momentum back."

No team did more for the Bruins' fan base and momentum than Colorado last November. In the span of two weeks, the Buffaloes had the Bruins playing in the Pac-12 championship game.

First, Colorado came to Pasadena and got walloped, 45-6, at the Rose Bowl. Then, a week later, the Buffaloes went to Salt Lake City and upset Utah. That sent UCLA off to Eugene to play — and lose to — Oregon in the inaugural Pac-12 championship game.

The Buffaloes seemed to be nothing more than a confidence boost for opposing teams through the first three weeks of this season. Their 0-3 start included embarrassments against Sacramento State and Fresno State.

Sacramento State is a step down, playing on Football Championship Subdivision level, but upset Colorado, 30-28. Fresno State belongs to Football Bowl Subdivision, but the Bulldogs' dominating 69-14 victory made people wonder whether Colorado did.

Just when the Buffaloes seemed to be every Pac-12 opponents' dream team, they rallied to beat Washington State.

This would not have been seen as a watershed moment in seasons past.

Colorado has won a national title, rolled to victory in big bowl games and for a time went *mano a mano* with ranked Nebraska teams. The victory Saturday left the Buffaloes with a 6-19 record since winning three of their first four games to start the 2010 season.

It had reached a point where Embree decided that a motivational video was needed to pump up his players for Washington State. Quarterback Jordan Webb engineered the comeback, but Embree awarded game balls to Jamie Guy, Colorado's director of sports video, and his assistant.

"It was very satisfying for the players," Embree said of the victory. "They have been through a lot. We lost a few close games and the Fresno State game was over at the coin toss, so to speak. The victory validates a lot work our kids put in."

chris.foster@latimes.com

twitter.com/cfosterlatimes