

Football: CU Buffs can't look past Sacramento State

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

Losing the Rocky Mountain Showdown in Denver is not rock bottom for Colorado football.

Losing at Folsom Field to a Big Sky team is.

That's something Jon Embree's Buffs will try to avoid on Saturday when they host Sacramento State in the home opener (1 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

The Dan Hawkins era appeared doomed from the start when Montana State came to Boulder on Sept. 2, 2006, and upset a CU team that had played in the Big 12 championship game the year before.

After losing to the Bobcats from the FCS, 19-10, Hawkins vowed to use the experience as a teaching moment.

"If you can't understand how to deal with losing, you'll never know how it is to win," Hawkins said at his post-game press conference. "It's only devastating if you let it be that way. We understand that most people here will jump on our loss, but we all find out about ourselves when we're losing, and in some respect it might be a blessing."

It was more like a curse.

The losing never stopped and Hawkins was fired after compiling a 19-39 record over five seasons. One of those precious wins was a 31-24 comeback triumph over Eastern Washington on Sept. 6, 2008.

In that game, cornerback Cha'pelle Brown -- who was beaten for a touchdown pass as a true freshman in the loss to Montana State -- intercepted a pass and returned it 27 yards to break a 24-24 tie with less than two minutes left.

This season Brown is a defensive graduate assistant on the CU staff. He will be able to warn the young Buffs not to take the Hornets lightly.

"To me, it's no different than playing Colorado State or UCLA," Brown said of preparing for Sacramento State. "For us, we can't take any game lightly because we haven't proved anything yet and we're trying to get to a bowl game."

Three of CU's true freshmen cornerbacks -- Kenneth Crawley, Marques Mosley and Yuri Wright -- saw a lot of action during Saturday's 22-17 loss to Colorado State.

With free safety Ray Polk and starting cornerback Greg Henderson suffering ankle injuries against the Rams, the trio might be relied on to make some plays in their Folsom Field debut.

"Man, I couldn't even tell you," Brown said when asked what the emotions are like for a CU player running out onto the field behind Ralphie for the first time in Boulder. "I know they're going to be nervous, anxious and excited at the same time."

Sacramento State, picked to finish ninth in the preseason Big Sky coaches poll, opened the season with a 49-19 loss at New Mexico State.

Starting quarterback Garrett Safron threw for 309 yards and two touchdowns for the Hornets, who were within nine points before getting outscored 21-0 in the fourth quarter at Las Cruces.

"You've got to take this game the same way as any other team," Brown said. "If not, you're going to get beat."

The film from the deflating loss to the Rams should provide the CU coaches and players with plenty of motivation this week. Embree will no doubt mention that Sacramento State opened the 2011 season with a 29-28 overtime victory at Oregon State.

The Beavers played seven true freshmen in that game. The Buffs used nine members of the 2012 recruiting class in Saturday's opener.

"Every single loss I've been through with this program, I've taken it with a grain of salt," CU junior left tackle David Bakhtiari said at Sports Authority Field. "Because I know that now it's in the past and the only thing I'm looking forward to is the next game coming up."

The Buffs are 1-1 all-time against FCS opponents having never played one before the visits by Montana State and Eastern Washington.

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Despite opening-game loss, Colorado encouraged by freshman debuts

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

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DenverPost.com

For Colorado coaches and fans, it won't soften that punch to the gut administered Saturday by Colorado State with the 22-17 Rams victory in the Rocky Mountain Showdown, but the performance by CU freshmen may offer some encouragement and optimism about the long-term growth of the program.

Colorado used 11 scholarship freshmen in its season opener, including two redshirt freshmen: wide receiver Nelson Spruce and offensive tackle Stephane Nembot.

Speaking to the media after the game, CU coach Jon Embree apparently did not detect stage fright among those making their debuts, although several freshmen acknowledged feeling some jitters.

"The young guys played well, with this being their first game," Embree said. "We recruited them here for a reason. We will just keep feeding them to the fire."

The biggest splash was made by Spruce, a 6-foot-2, 195-pounder from suburban Los Angeles. A season-opening starter, Spruce recorded eight receptions to tie the school record for most catches by a CU player in his first game.

His 15-yard touchdown in the second quarter on a pass from quarterback Jordan Webb impressed the Colorado coaches. Spruce maintained his concentration in the end zone as a CSU defender flashed in front of him in an unsuccessful attempt at an interception.

"It was nice having a good game, I guess," Spruce told reporters afterward. "But the ultimate goal is a win, and we didn't get that. We have to go back and start working again. I feel as the season goes on, (the freshmen) will get better each week."

One true freshman, cornerback Kenneth Crawley, opened the game in CU's starting lineup. Other first-year players seeing action in plays from scrimmage were defensive tackle Tyler Henington, tight end Vincent Hobbs, safety Marques Mosley, fullback Christian Powell, wide receiver Gerald Thomas, defensive tackle Josh Tupou and cornerback Yuri Wright. Donta Abron, a tailback by trade, also made his college debut but drew most of his action on special teams.

Crawley, from Washington D.C., was credited with seven tackles — second on the team — and also returned three punts for 38 yards. He did muff a punt (recovered by a teammate) and also was involved in a miscommunication on pass coverage that allowed CSU's momentum-changing 20-yard touchdown just before the end of the second quarter.

Freshmen are going to make mistakes. Coaches hope the good outweighs the bad, and that the youngsters learn from the errors.

"I feel like I could have done better, but I think I played well (overall)," Crawley said. "There were just a couple of mistakes. We have to take this back to practice and do what we need to do to perform better in the next game."

The defensive secondary and defensive line had been considered the plums of the recruiting class that signed with Colorado in February. Those two areas did not disappoint.

Henington (from Mullen High School) and the 6-3, 325-pound Tupou logged time in the trenches, with Tupou recording a tackle for loss. In the secondary, Crawley was joined by fellow freshmen Mosley and Wright. Mosley registered a tackle and forced fumble on defense and also returned two kickoffs for a 25-yard average.

Another highlight among the true freshmen was Thomas catching three passes for a total of 26 yards and running for 17 yards with a lateral (backward pass).

"It was real nerve-wracking," said Thomas, who supplies some much-needed speed to the receiving corps. "Just all

the people, the fans and family in the stands — I was nervous. I knew how much the game meant to everybody. Come next week in practice, I'll be more focused."

Rugged 6-foot, 235-pound fullback Christian Powell got his feet wet with a rush (3 yards) and reception (5 yards).

Also playing in their first game were two freshman walk-ons, defensive back Isaac Archuleta (Mountain Vista High School) and linebacker Clay Jones, both on special teams.

"The nervousness (among the freshmen) is out the window," Crawley said. "So now, we just need to step up and be leaders and just keep our team going."

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CU Buffs eye on: Sacramento State Hornets

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

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A look at Colorado's next opponent, Sacramento State:

Sacramento State (0-1) at Colorado (0-1), 1 p.m., Saturday, Pac-12 Network

For the record: Sacramento State, a member of the Big Sky Conference (Northern Colorado also is a member), lost 49-19 at New Mexico State on Thursday night. The Hornets pulled to within 28-19 in the third quarter before being outscored 21-0 in the fourth quarter.

Streaking: Saturday's game in Boulder will mark the third consecutive year that Sacramento State has played a Pac-12 opponent. The Hornets lost 52-17 at Stanford in 2010 but won 29-28 in 2011 at Oregon State.

Who's hot: Quarterback Garrett Safron. The sophomore played well against the Aggies, throwing for 308 yards and two touchdowns.

What's not: The Hornets' running game. It netted only 89 yards on Thursday, and top rusher Ezekiel Graham managed only 47 yards on 16 carries.

Key stat: Three turnovers for Sacramento State to none for New Mexico State.

FYI: Sacramento State will be the first FCS team to play CU since 2008, when Eastern Washington lost 31-24 but gave the Buffs a scare in Boulder.

Injury report: None reported.

Coachpeak: "There were some good moments and there were some positive things to take away from (the loss at New Mexico State)." — Hornets coach Marshall Sperbeck

Tom Kensler, *The Denver Post*