

Colorado football: Buffs' defense making progress despite ugly numbers

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
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Buffzone.com

Two games into Pac-12 play, the Colorado football team has given up 101 points and 1,295 yards.

Those are ugly numbers, but Colorado (2-2, 0-2 Pac-12) isn't panicking about its defense just yet.

"You've just got to keep playing," head coach Mike MacIntyre said. "I think we're playing hard, I think we're making some plays, we're challenging them in some ways. Now we've just got to start finishing off more and more, and being more precise in our alignments and (making) our reads quicker."

CU gave up 755 yards in Saturday's 57-16 loss to No. 2 Oregon after allowing 540 yards in a 44-17 loss to Oregon State a week earlier.

The results are all too familiar for CU fans, who watched the Buffs give up 47.9 points per game in Pac-12 play last year. Senior linebacker Derrick Webb said this defense isn't the same as it was a year ago, though.

"No, not at all," he said. "There was no real resistance against (Oregon's) offense (last year). I feel like we really made them work (on Saturday), we really challenged them on defense. They had to go into their playbook a little bit and pull out some new things.

"We're just a lot more competitive out there (this year)."

Defensive coordinator Kent Baer said that while the results don't look good, progress is being made.

"I think those kids are still learning our defense and I think you have to take the positives and there was a lot of positives yesterday, there really was," he said. "People don't see that, but there are, and I want to make sure we look at those positives and be upbeat about them. And, I want to make sure that we learn from the things that we did wrong."

Baer said communication is key to his defense, and that area has to improve.

"There's a lot of communication involved in this defense," he said. "We have to continue to communicate. A couple of breakdowns (against Oregon), we communicated maybe halfway across the board, but we didn't get the whole communication all the way across."

Baer has been through this before, having struggled during his first season at San Jose State. Having gone through that, he believes CU will have a good defense eventually.

"I think the more veteran you get the better you'll be," he said. "We kind of faced the same at

San Jose State. We had two true freshmen linebackers and it seemed like nothing went right their first year and then second year, wow, they started to pick it up. Third year, they were awesome.

"Some of our younger guys are playing really well. I think everybody has bought in. I really feel good about that.

"We just have to keep pushing it."

After facing two top-20 offenses -- Oregon ranks No. 2 nationally with 59.2 points per game and Oregon State is 20th at 41.6 per game -- the Buffs get another one this week. On Saturday, they'll visit Arizona State, which ranks 16th nationally with 42.2 points per game.

Contact staff writer Brian Howell at howellb@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/BrianHowell33.

CU Buffs charged with rebounding after two blowout losses

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

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BOULDER — The growing pains of a first-year program are starting to become more painful. The routs are coming. Established Pac-12 programs are picking on Colorado like it's the new little kid in school.

How the Buffaloes respond will determine whether they can threaten for a bowl bid or if they will fall back to the bottom of the Pac-12, where they were predicted to finish.

Saturday's 57-16 pounding at the hands of second-ranked Oregon came on the heels of a 44-17 beatdown at Oregon State. Two conference games. Two lopsided losses.

Up next is Arizona State (3-2, 1-1 Pac-12), which sent Lane Kiffin to the unemployment line with a 62-41 win over Southern California on Sept. 28 and lost 37-34 to Notre Dame on a neutral field Saturday night.

A year ago, the Buffaloes were unable to slow the onslaughts. After a 42-14 loss to UCLA, the humiliations came week after week after week: 51-17 to Arizona State, 50-6 at USC, 70-14 at Oregon, 48-0 to Stanford.

These Buffs (2-2, 0-2) erased the memories of the worst season in school history with victories in their first two games. The snowball of defeatism that rolled downhill a year ago looked like Mount Evans by the time coach Jon Embree lost his job.

First-year coach Mike MacIntyre has put a smiley face on CU's program. Constantly upbeat and encouraging, MacIntyre is getting his players to focus on the positives.

"We have a lot of heart, and we showed a lot of resilience," said receiver Paul Richardson, second nationally with 155.3 yards per game. "I'm just so proud of my team. ... This is an up-and-coming program, and I know we showed a lot of people what we can do."

He can't get too carried away. Only Oklahoma, in an epic 82-42 rout in 1980, gained more yards against Colorado than Oregon's 755 on Saturday. Quarterback Marcus Mariota carved a paragraph into his Heisman campaign with seven touchdowns. Colorado went a school-record 0-for-15 on third down.

But the Buffs had 318 total yards at halftime and took two leads on Oregon, something no other team had done this season. Hey, it's something.

"I don't think we're down," said cornerback Greg Henderson, whose two interceptions gave him the national lead with 1.0 per game. "We're disappointed. But this is a good team, the No. 2 team in the country. We came out hard. We fought hard. We just have to learn from everything we did wrong and everything we did right.

"We still have a long season ahead."

With the improvement of the Pac-12, the season could be very long, again. It'll be up to MacIntyre to put his players in position to narrow the talent gap, not to mention add a few soothing words.

"You're going to have to do that some," he said. "It's natural human instinct (to get down). But I was pleased with the way they were acting in the locker room. I was pleased how they kept battling out there and didn't just lay down."

John Henderson: jhenderson@denverpost.com or twitter.com/johnhendersondp

Eye on ...The Sun Devils

Colorado at Arizona State, 8 p.m. Saturday, Pac-12

For the record: Arizona State is 1-1 in the Pac-12 and 3-2 overall after a 37-34 loss to Notre Dame on Saturday in Arlington, Texas.

Streaking: For the first time in second-year ASU coach Todd Graham's tenure, the Sun Devils didn't record a sack. Notre Dame had six.

Who's hot: Jaelen Strong had eight catches for 136 yards, his fourth consecutive 100-yard game.

Who's not: Preseason All-America defensive lineman Will Sutton has only 16 tackles, including 2½ for loss and just one sack. A year ago, he had 23½ tackles for loss and 13 sacks.

Key stat: ASU is ninth nationally in passing offense at 359.4 yards per game.

Quotable: "We played our tails off for the first five games, and now it's all conference play. We go to work. This team is capable of winning a championship. We've got to get things corrected." — Graham, after Saturday's 37-34 loss to Notre Dame

FYI: Senior Jake Sheffield, a former all-state offensive guard from Gateway High School in Aurora, is a backup defensive tackle. He served 18 months with the Marines, including two tours of Iraq.

John Henderson, The Denver Post