

CU Buffs' defensive secondary markedly better than in 2012

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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DenverPost.com

BOULDER — There are many reasons Colorado's secondary has gone from terrible to terrific this season. New defensive coordinator Kent Baer. A year's experience. Safety Parker Orms' health. Here's another one:

Popsicles.

"We have a competition period where offense goes against defense, and if they don't win, then defense has to run all three (practice) fields," first-year coach Mike MacIntyre said. "During the camp, we did a thing where if they lost, they didn't get popsicles and the other guys got popsicles. It's fun to watch them compete for those popsicles."

Hey, whatever works.

Last year's coaching staff would have offered stock in Apple if it helped the defense make a play. Nothing helped. Colorado had all of three interceptions last year, matching its output in 1984 for the fewest in school history — and third to last nationally.

Two games into 2013, CU has matched that total. Count the crucial forced fumble by freshman nickel back Chidobe Awuzie and two pick-sixes against Central Arkansas, plus Greg Henderson's fumble return for a score against Colorado State, and the Buffaloes have gone from dead ducks to ballhawks.

"I'm not surprised at all, actually," said Paul Richardson, who leads the nation in receiving yards. "Ever since Coach Baer has gotten here, he's been on his defensive coaches and he's been on his defensive players, and it shows."

Much of it is Baer's doing. Colorado is his fifth job in the conference, and nearly every one of his defenses showed marked improvement the first year. The Buffs' defense is doing more live drills. And a talented group of defensive backs, many of whom should have been redshirted last year, are a year older.

"It's something we emphasize all the time," Baer said. "We totally talk about it every day, work on it every day, practice it every day. What you emphasize, you usually get."

The year's experience has been crucial. Take sophomore cornerback Kenneth Crawley. Henderson had a quietly good year in 2012 because teams were picking on Crawley, then a true freshman.

But against Central Arkansas on Saturday night, Courtney Whitehead beat Crawley on what looked like a 33-yard touchdown pass. But Whitehead slightly bobbled it and Crawley pushed him out of bounds before he could regain control.

Colorado kept its 7-0 lead.

"When I first got here, nothing against anybody else, Kenneth would have stopped," Mac Intyre said. "That's a big deal. We pointed it out to him. 'Hey, Kenneth. You got beat, but you kept running. It's not over till they catch it.' "

However, at 12:05 p.m. on Saturday, the secondary steps up in class. Coming to town is Fresno State senior Derek Carr, who torched the Buffaloes for five touchdown passes in the first half of last year's 69-14 stomping. He has already thrown eight touchdown passes in two wins.

This year should be different. The secondary's mood sure is.

"I remember going in after the (Central Arkansas) game and shaking all the guys' hands," Orms said. " 'Congratulations on getting an interception.' Now I've got to get one."

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Colorado football: Buffs want more out of their run game

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The running game easily was the strength of the Colorado offense in 2012 though production was spotty throughout a difficult season.

With most of the starters back this fall on offense, as well as the three top running backs from a year ago, CU figured to be able to rely on that ground game as the passing game found its way.

But through the first two games in a new offense and under new coaches, the Buffs haven't found their groove in the running game while the passing game featuring quarterback Connor Wood and wide receiver Paul Richardson has been a saving grace, and, at times, a thing of beauty.

An 11-yard run by Tony Jones is the longest by a running back so far. He is the only running back with a carry for more than 10 yards and CU is still looking for its first rushing touchdown of the year. Wide receiver D.D. Goodson (31 yards) and Wood (19 yards) have the longest runs from scrimmage.

"We've got to get our pads down and be able to fit through some tight spots and break some tackles," running back, fullbacks and tight ends coach Klayton Adams said. "Improving in those areas is a key for us and a goal for us this week."

Yet, it's not as if the Buffs aren't gaining ground on the ground. They ran for 109 yards against Colorado State and 84 yards against Central Arkansas. They are totals they hope to improve on to be sure.

CU coaches might argue that their short passing game is getting the job done where the running game is not.

"I think that we just need to keep pushing it and keep working with it and I think we'll eventually do better at it," coach Mike MacIntyre said. "We just haven't broken a 50-yard run that you all of a sudden go instead of having 120 yards rushing you're at 175. So we need to do that and I'm hoping that happens this week."

The Buffs host Fresno State on Saturday afternoon at Folsom Field (noon, Pac-12 Network) and should be able to move the ball on the ground and through the air against the Bulldogs.

Fresno State isn't off to a great start this season when it comes to stopping the run. The Bulldogs are allowing 184 yards a game on the ground. They rank 106th in the nation after two weeks in total defense, allowing 480 yards a game.

Starting tailback Christian Powell has been hampered by a thigh bruise, the same injury that slowed him at times last season. Powell is expected to play against Fresno State and

coaches believe a bye week following the game will help him return to full strength or close to it for the start of Pac-12 Conference play.

Being successful in the running game obviously involves more than the running backs. Offensive linemen, tight ends and wide receivers all must do their part to have consistent success. CU coaches believe they are making progress in developing that consistency. It just hasn't showed up in games yet.

Jones and Powell have nearly split carries so far this season, with Jones carrying 25 times for 85 yards and Powell rushing 21 times for 64 yards. Those numbers might be slightly different in Powell's favor if not for his injury, but both players are expected to have plenty of opportunities this fall.

Sophomore Donta Abron is the only other running back to carry the ball in a game so far. He has rushed 10 times for 14 yards.

Players say they are not happy with the results from the running game to this point but they're patiently trying to fix the mistakes they see on film. Jones said the running backs are running the ball where plays are designed to go, but the entire offense hasn't been able to make those plays work as they're designed to yet.

"We're definitely doing that," Jones said. "It isn't like we're not playing against good defenses. But we're going to get it together and we're going to get that fixed."

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Colorado football: Buffs must deal with Fresno State's Burse

Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

Last week, Fresno State's Isaiah Burse returned two punts for touchdowns against Cal Poly. During his career, he has averaged 18.5 yards on 14 punt returns.

With CU having already given up a punt return for touchdown (and having issues in the kick return game, too), the Buffs are wary of the Bulldogs' senior.

"We have to kick it in certain places, pin him down certain places, do different things," Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre said. "You don't want to just kick it down the middle 50 yards high and say, 'OK, may the best man win.'"

With such a dangerous returner on the field, the Buffs could utilize Darragh O'Neill's skills with the rugby-style punt.

"I think it causes the other team not to rush sometimes," MacIntyre said. "It also gives you the ability to kick it and roll and get it out of bounds. It gives you the ability, if they don't rush, you can run with it. We've always done it."

Because O'Neill can also go left with the rugby punt, MacIntyre said, "It's a good weapon for us. "

Notable

Right tackle Stephane Nembot had been dealing with an injured finger the past few weeks and was in a lot of pain after getting hit in that finger Wednesday. MacIntyre said Nembot should be fine, though. ... The rain poured down on the Buffs all throughout practice Wednesday, but the team simply moved to the artificial turf. Other than that, the weather didn't impact practice. ... Fresno State's defense has generated just two sacks.

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Colorado football: Pressure on for Buffs to pressure Fresno State's Carr

Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Fresno State quarterback Derek Carr is not an easy man to bring down.

Nevertheless, the Colorado defense will attempt to harass the senior and third-year starter on Saturday when the Bulldogs (2-0) visit Folsom Field for a date with the Buffaloes (2-0.

"We've got to find a way to hit him and make him feel uncomfortable," CU head coach Mike MacIntyre said. "If not, he'll be able to make plays."

This season, Carr has been sacked just once. Avoiding pressure has allowed him to completed 74 of 104 passes for 661 yards, eight touchdowns and one interception.

"With their scheme, there's a lot of quick throws, a lot of bubble throws, so if we're going to get there, we've got to get their quick," CU defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe.

Generally, Fresno State does not give up a lot of sacks. In 28 games as a starter, Carr has been sacked just 46 times -- seven of those in a loss to SMU in the 2012 Hawaii Bowl. Seven times, Carr has avoided sacks and nine other times, he's been brought down just once.

"He's thrown the most completions under 10 yards of any quarterback in the country the last two years," MacIntyre said, eluding to the Bulldogs' dependence on screens and quick passes. "They get rid of the ball so fast. The thing we have to do is tip some balls, which we've been doing. When he's going to hold the ball and has to get longer downs and distances, that's when we have to get to him."

To this point, CU has just three sacks in two games, but one of those came on a bad snap by Colorado State. Only twice has CU actually tackled the quarterback for a loss. MacIntyre, however, said the Buffs are making some progress in their pass rush.

"They have harassed the quarterback," he said. "I don't think the pocket has always been clean for the quarterback, which is good, but we need to get to the quarterback more."

This might be a tough week to do that, but Uzo-Diribe said the Buffs will do their best.

"Just getting pressure inside," he said of the key to harassing Carr. "If (the Colorado defensive tackles) can blow their guys right back in his face and disrupt his timing with his receivers, that'll give us on the edge a little bit more time to get there."

The Buffs have to be smart about their pass rush, though, because of Fresno State's success with screens.

"Because they run a lot of screens, we don't want to completely take ourselves out of the play trying to rush the quarterback," Uzo-Diribe said. "We just have to read our keys."

Since becoming the starter in 2011, Carr is 2-6 when he's sacked three times or more, but 13-7 when sacked two times or less (including 10-1 since the start of last year).

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DeRuyter Q&A: Breaking down Boise aftermath, looking ahead

Colorado football embraces vision of new coach Mike MacIntyre

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By Bryant-Jon Anteola — The Fresno Bee

Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre has been through this process before — taking over a program in the dumps.

Four years ago, MacIntyre took on his first head coaching job and inherited a San Jose State program that had finished 2-9.

By MacIntyre's third season with the Spartans, San Jose State had a 10-2 regular season and No. 24 national ranking.

Colorado is hoping MacIntyre can rebuild the Buffaloes in similar fashion. Except this potential turnaround might be more daunting, with the once-proud program coming off the worst season in its 123-year history. Colorado and Fresno State are both 2-0 heading into Saturday's game at Folsom Field in Boulder.

"When I first got here, everyone was down a bit; they hadn't done well in awhile," MacIntyre said. "It's been fun, though. You go through this process once before, you kind of have a better idea what it takes to do things more efficiently, make things go smoother.

"That doesn't mean it's easy. There are similarities between the two situations, but every situation is also different. The good thing is, I've learned from my mistakes at San Jose."

A year ago, Colorado finished 1-11 to tie for the worst record among the schools from the six Bowl Championship Series conferences — and the Bulldogs applied one of the worst beatings, racing to a 48-0 lead before pulling their starters en route to a 69-14 victory.

Coach Jon Embree was fired after the season, his second year with the Buffaloes. Though Colorado hit rock bottom under Embree, the downward slide began during the final seasons under Dan Hawkins, the former Boise State coach who headed the Buffaloes from 2005-2010.

In between Hawkins' firing with three games left in 2010 and Embree's hiring, Colorado also had an interim head coach in longtime assistant Brian Cabral.

Such turnover is partly what makes this rebuilding project all the more difficult, MacIntyre said. At San Jose State, MacIntyre took over a program that had been stabilized some by longtime coach Dick Tomey.

"Some of the kids on my team have had three head coaches," MacIntyre said. "So that's tough on them. Developing trust in these young men can be tough.

"But they've bought in."

Of course, Colorado had its attrition, as happens with most coaching changes, and eight players during the past offseason either quit or were asked to leave the program.

MacIntyre is hoping Colorado's early successes — a 41-27 victory against in-state rival Colorado State to start the season followed by a 38-24 win over Central Arkansas last week — will keep players motivated

and that they'll continue to trust the staff.

Fresno State coach Tim DeRuyter said it's easy to see that this isn't the same Colorado program from a year ago.

A couple of early stats indicate that Colorado is on the same track that San Jose State was during MacIntyre's last season with the Spartans. Most notably, Buffaloes quarterback Connor Wood ranks fifth in the nation with 741 passing yards and wide out Paul Richardson leads the nation with 417 receiving yards.

Colorado, like San Jose State did under MacIntyre, is running a multiple-set offense and uses a combination of pro-style, pistol, I-formation and spread schemes.

"You look at last year's team and what they've already done this year and it looks like they're already in the third year of installing their systems," DeRuyter said. "Those guys are playing with a lot of confidence, playing much faster than they did a year ago. It's a testament to him and his staff that they were able to get a great buy-in from their players to already play that fast. So obviously, they're really good teachers as well as good motivators.

"They're 2-0, doing really good things. We'll have our challenges."

FRESNO STATE AT COLORADO

Kickoff: 11 a.m. Saturday

Records: Bulldogs 2-0, Buffaloes 2-0

TV: Pac-12 Network (Comcast Ch. 104; will not be shown on regular Pac-12 Network Channel in California); Dish Network Ch. 5454; not available on DirecTV

Radio: KFIG (AM 940); KGST (AM 1600)

How to watch Saturday's game

Fresno State's football game at Colorado will be televised by the Pac-12 Network, but it will be available on television on just two of the Fresno area's major cable carriers — Comcast Xfinity and Dish Network.

The Bulldogs-Buffaloes game is being carried by Pac-12 Mountain, one of six regional channels that make up the Pac-12 Network. The other five regional channels along with the primary Pac-12 Network channel will be showing the USC-Boston College game at the same time as Fresno State-Colorado.

For fans who do not get Pac-12 Mountain as part of their cable subscription, Comcast in California and Dish have added the Bulldogs-Buffaloes game, on Comcast channel 104 and Dish channel 5454.

Many Pac-12 TV providers allow customers remote access to all seven of the Pac-12 Network channels on computers or mobile devices. Check for access by visiting **pac-12.com/networks** and clicking on a regional network. If a user's provider is listed, they select it and enter the username and password they have with the provider to authenticate.

Comcast subscribers can log in through Xfinity.com. Fans looking for the Colorado-Fresno State game will need to select Pac-12 Mountain.

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