



By: Joel Broida

Sophomore corner Kenneth Crawley has one of CU's three interceptions this season.

Brooks: Buffs Got Head Start In Prepping For OSU QB

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

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BOULDER – Three weeks ago Colorado's defense was feverishly preparing for Fresno State quarterback Derek Carr. That matchup never materialized but the preparation was hardly wasted.

On Saturday the Buffs 'D' faces Oregon State's Sean Mannion, and this is CU cornerbacks coach Andy LaRussa's assessment of Carr and Mannion: "You're preparing for basically the same guy, they're both damn good quarterbacks. They both can sling the ball really well and both are really accurate. It's going to be quite a challenge."

It will be that way weekly as the Buffs wade into the Pac-12 Conference. Quarterback play in the Pac-12 this season appears to be typically superb; eight league members – including OSU at No. 3 and CU at No. 7 – are listed among the NCAA's top 18 passing offenses.

LaRussa's "same guy" comparison of Mannion and Carr is statistically sound. Mannion is second on the NCAA stat sheet in passing yards per game (401.0), while Carr is third (373.7). Mannion averages 33 completions a game (15 TDs, one interception), Carr 37 (12 TDs, one interception). Mannion leads the FBS in total passing yards (1,606).

If LaRussa's corners have observed a difference on tape in the play of Carr/Mannion, it is this: Carr might be the more mobile of the two. But, noted LaRussa, "I don't know that that changes anything. In our position you still have to cover guys as long as you can. (Mannion) does a great job . . . he's kind of like Dan Marino or Payton Manning. They're not the fastest guys but they find a way to keep the play alive and take downfield shots. So in that regard you have to stay in coverage."

Added senior safety Parker Orms on Mannion: "He can still get out of the pocket and move. We have to put pressure on him; that's the big thing we're trying to do right now. If we can get pressure on the QB and have good coverage, we'll have a good day on the defensive side of the ball."

In its first two games – wins against Colorado State and Central Arkansas – CU's secondary held up well compared to the 2012 season. But corners Greg Henderson, a junior, and Kenneth Crawley, a sophomore, haven't yet faced a passing combination like they will in their Pac-12 opener.

Mannion's top target is Brandin Cooks, a compact (5-10, 186 pounds) junior who leads the NCAA in receiving yards (639) and is second nationally behind CU's Paul Richardson in receiving yards per game. Richardson averages 208.5, Cooks 159.8.

CU has allowed 240.5 passing yards a game – ninth in the Pac-12 – but only two TD passes. It's only been two games, but that still represents a dramatic improvement from a dizzying 2012 season that saw the Buffs yield a nation-worst 39 TD passes.

"We know our assignments better, we know where we're supposed to be on the field," Crawley said. "I feel like everybody is more comfortable doing their jobs. The coaches have us better prepared."

Crawley, tossed into the pass-mad Pac-12 last season as a freshman, said his increased comfort level is based on "the game coming to me way slower. And I've got more help over the top (usually from a safety)."

At Crawley's position, comfort comes from confidence – and LaRussa has seen Crawley's take a sharp upturn. "He's got a lot of his confidence back and that's a big part of it," LaRussa said. "That's a big intangible at that position. The way you carry yourself and let water fall off your back is big."

"You can't let yourself worry about the last play; you worry about the next play. Go out and make another play. As easy as we can give up a play, we can come back and make a big play and impact the game."

That's what the Buffs' corners – specifically Henderson – have done so far. Henderson has scored on a fumble return and an interception return, as has junior safety Jered Bell. Crawley also has an interception, giving CU three picks in two games. The Buffs had three picks total last season.

"We're creating turnovers and that's what helps us win ball games," Orms said. "If we can create more and not allow as many big plays we'll be a lot better than last year."

Oregon State (3-1, 1-0) has not run effectively, averaging a conference-worst 55 yards a game. But CU coach Mike MacIntyre says the Beavers compensate with Mannion's short passes, particularly the nine to 10 screen passes that are called per game.

"That's a lot of screens in a football game," MacIntyre said. "That also slows down your (pass) rush . . . so I consider that part of their running game. I look at them I say, 'Yeah they run the ball but they're also throwing 10 screens a game for 125 yards of passing a game.' That's really like a running catch or like a handoff to me."

So credit Mannion with making those lengthy and accurate handoffs to guys like Cooks. Surprisingly, Beavers coach Mike Riley kept fans in suspense by waiting until five days before OSU's Aug. 31st season-opener against Eastern Washington to name Mannion, a junior, the starter over senior Cody Vaz.

Both saw significant playing time last season, with Vaz taking over when Mannion suffered a knee injury in early October. Vaz led the Beavers in routs against BYU and Utah, but Mannion returned for OSU's trip to Washington. He threw four interceptions in that loss, then shared the job with Vaz for the rest of the regular season. But Riley started Vaz in OSU's Alamo Bowl loss to Texas.

Vaz has played in one game this season, completing four of six passes for 79 yards. So unless he's forced to change his mind again, Riley has settled on Mannion. Obviously, he has the Buffs' attention.

"He's got a good arm and if he can stay in the pocket he can be consistent and carve up a defense," Crawley said. "He can hurt you if you're a DB and you mess up."

NOTABLE: With the Green Bay Packers having a bye this weekend, former CU tackle David Bakhtiari attended Thursday morning's practice. Bakhtiari, who declared his eligibility for the NFL Draft last spring following his junior year, moved into a starting role at left tackle for the Packers. He spoke highly of the historic organization and said he believes he's adjusting well to the NFL. "I'm playing football -- which I love -- and getting paid for it," he said, grinning broadly . . . Slot receiver D.D. Goodson will switch to No. 3 for Saturday's game at OSU. Goodson has worn No. 21, but is expected to see more duty on special teams. Safety Jered Bell, also a special teams contributor, wears No. 21 -- hence the number change for Goodson . . . Freshman tailback Michael Adkins II is expected to see his first duty of the season against the Beavers. The 5-10, 200-pounder from San Diego Helix High School could work in a rotation with Christian Powell and Tony Jones. That pair and Donta Abron have been the only tailbacks used in the first two games . . . Oregon State's secondary coach is Rod Perry, who played for CU in 1973-74. Perry was All-Big 8 as a senior and earned honorable mention All-America honors. He was a fourth-round NFL draftee and played 10 seasons in the league (Los Angeles, Cleveland). Perry coached for 24 seasons in the NFL and has made two college stops (Fresno State, Oregon State).

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Coloado football: Buffs look to improve kickoff coverage

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Visions of Central Arkansas' Dillion Winfrey dashing down the Folsom Field turf have danced through the head of Colorado special teams coordinator Toby Neinas too much over the past three weeks.

"Normally you think about punt morning, noon and night," Neinas said. "But in this case here, it's kickoff and it's big."

Two games into the season, there has been very little to complain about with how Colorado (2-0) has played. The kickoff coverage unit, however, has been porous, and that bothers Neinas.

"That's all I think about right now," he said.

In Week 1 against Colorado State, CU gave up 192 yards on five kickoff returns, including an 84-yarder. The Buffs also gave up returns of 38 and 30 yards.

On Sept. 7, Winfrey had an 88-yard return that set up a field goal.

It's no wonder the Buffs rank 123rd nationally in kick return defense, allowing 35.6 yards per return.

CU has not played since that Sept. 7 game and Neinas has worked diligently to correct the problems.

"I don't want to say I didn't have them ready, but I didn't have them understanding the concepts that we needed to understand to execute the coverage game," Neinas said.

CU also gave up a 74-yard punt return for touchdown against CSU, but Neinas is not as worried about that unit. He credits CSU's Joe Hansley for making a great play. Aside from that play, CU has allowed just 38 yards on three punt returns.

"If a guy makes a great play in that much space (on a punt return), it's going to make you look bad," Neinas said. "On the particular big return that we've had against the punt team, I don't know that we would do it any differently if you gave us a chance to do it again."

"Kickoff coverage is a very different story."

It all starts with the kick, of course. Junior Will Oliver has put just one kick out of the back of the end zone -- his first kick of the year. Of his 15 kicks, just four have been touchbacks. Four have been fielded near the goal line. Winfrey's big return was fielded 2 yards deep.

After Winfrey's big return, the Buffs used pooch kicks on the last four attempts against UCA to get the ball near the 20 or 25 and avoid big returns.

Neinas said he's not concerned with Oliver, as long as the Buffs can do a better job of covering the kicks.

"Do you want a touchback? Sure," Neinas said. "But, you know, back when (Martin) Gramatica was at Kansas State, they used to run him if he kicked the ball as a touchback because he had the ability to hang the football and they were so fast that they could cover underneath it and pin. That's the best kick.

"The kick that drops at the 1 with a 4.1-(second) hang, that ball should never make it to the 20. That's the best kick. But, where we are right now, I'd take a touchback every time."

Oliver has been getting the ball near the goal line, but the issue has come after that, Neinas said. Opponents have found big holes.

"The single most disappointing thing if you watch us in Weeks 1 and 2 were the volume of people that we had down the field at reception and the fact that we weren't able to get the ball on the ground," he said. "We had people in the neighborhood, and I didn't get it done on that one.

"What it came down to was execution of the scheme and I did not have it impressed upon them enough to understand exactly what we needed to do to have success there. They were able to basically kind of Red Sea us, so to speak."

Since the Central Arkansas game, CU's kickoff coverage unit has spent a lot of time on fundamentals, such as shedding blocks quickly and getting back into lanes. Neinas has also hammered home the scheme that he wants to execute on game day.

Neinas is eager to see the results of the unit's hard work when they visit Oregon State on Saturday.

"It's very, very important from a psychological standpoint that we see success in that phase on Saturday," he said. "It's very important for our team to feel good about that, because mentally right now we're fragile when it comes to that team.

"I'll really be disappointed (if that unit is not better). We tried to break it all down and rebuild it up, and I really feel that the guys understand.

"Frankly, it's my responsibility, so it better show up on Saturday."

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Colorado football: Buffs-Beavers matchup features big-time receivers

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado wide receiver Paul Richardson admits he might steal a few looks at the Oregon State offense and specifically wide receiver Brandin Cooks on Saturday when the Buffs take on the Beavers.

But Richardson won't be admiring Cooks' game or comparing himself to one of the other top receivers in the conference and the country.

Richardson said if he is able to take a few minutes to watch Cooks and the rest of the Beavers, he will do so with the thought in mind of how he might be able to take what he sees and help his teammates on defense.

"Just from a receiver's perspective, if I notice anything he does that can help our defense, I'll definitely let them know," Richardson said after Thursday's practice. "That's the best way I can help our team."

The game between the Buffs and the Beavers in Corvallis, Ore., features the nation's two leading receivers in terms of receiving yards per game this season. Richardson is No. 1 in the nation averaging 208.5 yards per game, albeit, with only two games under his belt. Cooks is averaging 159.8 yards through four games.

Cooks has caught seven touchdown passes. Richardson has four. Both should be heavily involved once again this week.

Richardson said he doesn't go into the game aiming to outperform Cooks.

"I can't really say that I just want to do better than him because if I do better than him and we still lose, then it really means nothing," Richardson said.

Contact staff writer Kyle Ringo at ringok@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/kyleringo.

Henderson: Pac-12 football teams packing considerably more punch this season

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post
Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre picked a bad time for career advancement. The Pac-12 lost the likes of Chip Kelly, Matt Barkley, Kenjon Barner and Markus Wheaton — and got better.

The general consensus nationally is the Pac-12 has moved into a solid No. 2 behind the annual monolith, the SEC.

As Pac-12 play kicks off for everyone Saturday, numbers back it up. Until Arizona State got smoked at Stanford last Saturday, five teams were ranked; this week four are in the top 16. Only the SEC can top it, with four teams in the top 10.

Besides being 29-4 in nonconference games, the Pac-12 is 3-2 against ranked nonconference teams and 5-3 against the five BCS power conferences.

"I'm very, very impressed with the Pac-12," MacIntyre said. "I always have been. Sitting back and watching games, they have really good quarterbacks in this league.

"There are really good defensive linemen in this league and I think those two areas help you win and lose games the quickest in the upper echelon."

Here's an update on the Pac-12 in order of the most authoritative ranking — mine:

1. OREGON

Area of excellence:The second-ranked Ducks, as expected, haven't missed a beat under new coach Mark Helfrich. They're second nationally in total offense (672 yards per game), rushing (355.3), scoring (61.3 points per game) and turnover margin (plus-2.3).

Area of concern:Missed field goals cost the Ducks a conference title the last two years. They've already missed a 37-yard field goal and had an extra point blocked.

2. STANFORD

Area of excellence:Receiver Ty Montgomery has erased a preseason worry. He's third in the conference in all-purpose yards (165.7 per game) and is averaging 20.7 yards per catch.

Area of concern:The fifth-ranked Cardinal's feared defense looked spotty against Army and in the second half against Arizona State.

3. UCLA

Area of excellence:The Bruins' offense is explosive, averaging 52.7 points with tailback Jordan James (141.3 yards per game) joining QB Brett Hundley to help take over L.A.

Area of concern:A painfully young secondary gave up three TD passes to Nebraska's Taylor Martinez during the first half.

4. WASHINGTON

Area of excellence:Keith Price is back. A steady offensive line is helping him lead the league in pass efficiency (186.1).

Area of concern:Penalties. The No. 16 Huskies average 12 penalties, tied for most nationally with SMU, and 98.3 yards per game.

5. ARIZONA STATE

Area of excellence:Taylor Kelly is hot, passing for more than 300 yards in all three games, including a career-high 367 at Stanford.

Area of concern:Star nose tackle Will Sutton has no sacks or tackles for lost yardage.

6. WASHINGTON STATE

Area of excellence:Surprise! The Cougars are second in the league in defense (264.8 yards).

Area of concern:Connor Halliday still can't stop throwing interceptions. He has 10.

7. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Area of excellence:The Trojans' defense reminds you of the Pete Carroll days, ranking fourth nationally (230.5 yards).

Area of concern:Cody Kessler is dead last in league passing (89.5 yards) and only 10th in pass efficiency (134.2).

8. OREGON STATE

Area of excellence:Sean Mannion leads the nation in passing, averaging 401 yards.

Area of concern:The Beavers' defense got lit up by Eastern Washington and San Diego State in the first half.

9. ARIZONA

Area of excellence:Ka'deem Carey and Daniel Jenkins are fueling a strong running game averaging 322.3 yards per game.

Area of concern:B.J. Denker still unproven QB after throwing little vs. little competition.

10. UTAH

Area of excellence:With help from new coordinator Dennis Erickson, the Utes' offense is averaging 504.8 yards.

Area of concern:Utah's defense hasn't stopped anyone but itty-bitty Weber State.

11. CALIFORNIA

Area of excellence:Freshman QB Jared Goff leads the nation in total offense (429.1).

Area of concern:Where have you gone, D-coordinator Clancy Pendergast? To USC. Cal is giving up 556.3 yards per game, third-worst in the nation.

12. COLORADO

Area of excellence:Paul Richardson is better than ever after surgery. He leads the nation in receiving (208.5 yards).

Area of concern:The Buffaloes' three-week layoff may have killed the momentum created by their 2-0 start.

John Henderson: jhenderson@denverpost.com or twitter.com/johnhendersondp. Listen to Henderson talk college football on "Sports Weekend with John Henderson and Michael Klahr," 8-11 a.m. Saturdays on Mile High Sports radio (1510 AM or 93.7 FM).

On TV

Colorado at Oregon State, 1 p.m. Saturday, Pac-12 (Channel 430 on Comcast-Denver, 5453 on Dish; DirecTV doesn't offer the network)



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OSU football: Beavers looking to catch Colorado's Richardson



David Zalubowski

Colorado receiver Paul Richardson scores a touchdown earlier this month in a win over Central Arkansas. Richardson leads the nation in receiving yards per game. (David Zalubowski | Associated Press)

September 26, 2013 9:45 pm • By **KEVIN HAMPTON**, *Corvallis Gazette-Times*

(0) Comments

The play took a matter of seconds to develop.

Colorado quarterback Connor Wood dropped back to pass, rolled away from a charging Colorado State defender and sprinted toward the line of scrimmage.

By the time Wood unleashed his throw, Paul Richardson was alone, deep downfield.

Richardson caught the ball in stride for an 82-yard score.

It was the first of several big plays by Richardson in two games.

A 6-foot-1, 170-pound junior receiver, Richardson has piled up 417 yards on 21 catches with four touchdowns.

He leads the nation in receiving yards per game and is second to Brandin Cooks in receptions per game.

"Paul Richardson, he's a great athlete. I've been watching him and been hearing a lot about him," Oregon State cornerback Steven Nelson said.

"He has a lot of speed and plays the ball well and he's their go-to receiver, so we're just going to

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play him like we play everybody else."

Nelson and the Beavers will get a firsthand look at Richardson when he and the Buffaloes come to Reser Stadium for Saturday's noon kickoff.

Richardson doesn't seem to have lost a step, even after missing the 2012 season.

He took a redshirt season last year to recover from a torn ACL.

In fact, Richardson said he might be a little faster now.

"I've been doing a lot of lower-body exercises and I've been doing a lot more stretching," Richardson said during a CU press conference. "I'm a lot more flexible and I think all those things combined is what made me faster."

Richardson has been coming through with big plays for the Buffaloes this season.

He also had a 75-yard touchdown catch against Colorado State and TD receptions of 55 and 30 yards against Central Arkansas.

Stopping Richardson, or at least slowing him down, will be of utmost importance for the OSU defense on Saturday.

That's why Rashaad Reynolds tried to convince defensive coordinator Mark Banker and secondary coach Rod Perry to let him shadow Richardson for the entire game.

"The scheme is not put in place for me to do that. But that's what I wanted to do," Reynolds said.

"I want to guard him. A lot of people hyping him up, a lot of people saying he's good, which I know he's a good player. So with that said, I want to play him. I want to guard him every down. That's just the competitor in me."

No matter how the Beavers approach the puzzle of defending Richardson, it won't be easy to solve.

The Buffaloes try to get Richardson as many touches as possible.

"Wherever he's at, they're going to get him the ball," Reynolds said. "They move him around a lot, they do a good job of getting mix and matches for him, put him in the slot, put him at the 3 receiver, put him X or Z. They're going to make sure they're going to get him the rock."

Richardson often makes it easy for Wood to get him the ball.

Richardson finds any way possible to get open.

"The most impressive thing about him is he's a good route runner," Banker said. "When he's trying to convince you that he's staying shallow on a route, he does a great job of selling it and shows back up through the top of the coverage."

Banker said the Buffaloes often target Richardson on first or second down in an attempt to break a big gain.

Richardson makes catches down the middle of the field and on crossing routes.

"A couple times it's been some sideline throws, but other things it's been inside throws where people have just dropped coverage on the guy," Banker said. "Some of it is by design, where they fool you into thinking he's running a shallow route and next thing you know he pops up through the top of the coverage."

"So we've been working on things like that, what we call switch routes and making sure that we don't lose our eyes, specifically with the safeties, because it's not necessarily put on the corners all the time."

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