



COLORADO BUFFALOES



By: CUBuffs.com

Kicker Will Oliver turned in a busy afternoon in last Sunday's season-opener.



Brooks: Oliver Can Kick And More, But Don't Push It

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

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BOULDER – Will Oliver will tell you with as much honesty as he can muster that he's a football player who just happens to be on scholarship as a placekicker. Maybe he's right.

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For obvious reasons, most special teams coaches shudder when thinking of their kickers making tackles on kickoffs. But take a peek at Colorado's one-game statistics and see who's tied for the lead in special teams points – that's from tackles, forced fumbles, fumbles recovered, wedge breaks, etc.

The 5-11, 190-pound Oliver, no one's idea of a beast, and freshman defensive back Tedric Thompson each accumulated three special teams points in CU's 41-27 opening win over CSU. Oliver finished with two solo tackles and assisted on another. It was, ahem, a career-best hitting performance; Oliver had made one tackle in his previous two seasons. Three in one game should earn him combat pay.

Check back in mid-October and Wild Will likely – or so hopes special teams coordinator Toby Neinas – will have surrendered his perch at the top of the ST tackling chart. If that doesn't happen, let's just say the Buffs' first-game kick coverage shortcomings have gone viral. But Neinas and his boss, Mike MacIntyre, say the coverage issues – CSU had a 74-yard scoring punt return and an 84-yard kickoff return – are being addressed.

As for our kicker-turned-headhunter, Oliver concedes, "I was a little aggressive and I've been talked to about that. I think I had one (tackle) inside the 25 yard-line, which I'm not supposed to do. (Neinas) has us sprinting down the field then kind of slowing down, which I hadn't done before. I kind of jogged down the field. Sprinting down, I'm a little farther ahead of where I usually am. So when I start to break down, maybe it's a little too close . . . in case something breaks I'm the last line of defense. There's a fine line about (kickers) making tackles but you can't miss them."

In Oliver's "day job" – placekicking – he was pretty impressive, too. He opened his junior season by hitting all four of his field goal attempts and tying his career-long make with a 52-yarder that put the Buffs back in the lead (26-24) early in the fourth quarter.

Oliver had said in August camp that he believed his range had increased to 55 yards in – and last weekend's 52-yard kick had at least four or five yards to spare. "I was proud of him," Neinas said. "I thought his leg looked really live. He did a nice job preparing for the game and limiting his kicks leading up to the game, including pregame. He had an awful lot of pop in his leg."

After a productive preseason camp, Oliver entered the opener feeling "more confident, more relaxed and with much less nerves. You never know until you're out there on the field whether you have them or not. I had the usual pregame nerves, but on the 52 (yarder) I was so calm about it I was almost not prepared for it. I didn't let it catch up with me; I just trotted out on the field like we always do and then it was snap, hold, kick and done."

Simple as that.

Neinas' seasonal goal for his placekickers is to have 16-18 attempts, "and we're certainly on track for that," he added. "I don't know if we can go beyond 18, but if we can get him 18 attempts and we hit 85 percent or better we can really, really help our football team. Will will tell you he wants 100 percent on 20 attempts . . . I have to try and present it in a different light."

Oliver also was perfect on three extra point attempts and would rather see his offense present him with those opportunities on Saturday night when the Buffs open at Folsom Field against Central Arkansas (6 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

Oliver also kicked off eight times in the opener, recording two touchbacks among those eight tries. And following Justin Castor's season-ending leg injury, Oliver likely will retain the kickoff duty permanently. With all of Sunday's kicking, Oliver admitted his right leg tired "a little bit." But also said shifting winds at Sports Authority Field at Mile High factored into at least one of his kickoffs not reaching the end zone.

"In that stadium there's different levels of wind," Oliver said. "I thought one of my (kicks) that dropped around the goal line, I thought that was one of my best kicks. And it just kind of died. Then we started to do some other stuff because we had a little coverage stuff going on. But obviously in the game you adapt on the fly and move on."

Neinas didn't mention the shifting wind, but took blame for the short kick: "(It) was probably more me than him; I was concerned about coverage for obvious reasons at that time. I said, 'Will get me a touchback here if you can.' He tried to over-hit the ball. That's a little bit me over-coaching him. But, overall, yeah, it was a great way to start."

Oliver agreed, but filed it all away almost immediately and began looking ahead. Last weekend's overall performance, he said, was merely a nice way to get started: "Obviously you want to build on everything you have. So it's a new week, new team. A lot of people will say I was four-for-four; well, going into this game it's zero-for-zero. It's only the next one that matters."

"It's good to have some success right at the beginning; it gives you something to build on. Last year I can't remember when I had my first kick or two, but it didn't come for a while. You're kind of waiting for it, kind of champing at the bit to get an opportunity. So it's nice to get out there (early) and get a chance in different situations – short, long and everything in between."

"Everything in between" could include those tackles. It's OK if he continues to make them, but isn't it better for all concerned if he's not forced to? No one minds if gets his special teams points in other ways.

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Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Bufs face tall task vs. speedy spread offense to win first home game since Nov. 2011

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The biggest surprise in the past six days since the Colorado football team opened the season with a win over Colorado State might be that Paul Richardson's stirring comments about returning to Folsom Field didn't receive more attention.

There were likely some former Buffs who felt their hair stand on end listening to the junior wide receiver speak at Tuesday's weekly press luncheon. There are places in the SEC where Richardson's thoughts would already be chiseled in stone if spoken about those stadiums and those programs.

"To be on Folsom, even without the stands packed, just for a couple walk-throughs and practices, that feeling is overwhelming almost," Richardson said. "It's like ... it takes over your body. It takes over your mind. It's special.

"And I have a lot of respect for all the great teams and great players and great coaches that were here before us. I really take pride in playing on Folsom and I really try my hardest to keep the team together and play as hard as I can to protect this field."

Richardson returned to active duty, so to speak, last week in the season opener against the Rams and reminded everyone just what a special talent he is with 10 catches for 208 yards and two touchdowns. He missed the entire 2012 season after suffering a knee injury.

Saturday night he will play his first game on the field he loves since late in the 2011 season. The Buffs host Central Arkansas (6:07 p.m. Pac-12 Network) in the 37th night game in Folsom Field history.

CU is trying to end a six-game home losing streak. The Buffs failed to win a home game last season for the first time in the history of Folsom Field. They are 1-10 at home dating back to the start of the 2011 season with the only victory coming in November 2011 against Arizona.

Meanwhile, the Buffs haven't opened a season 2-0 since 2008.

It is only the second time Central Arkansas has played a team from a Bowl Championship Series Conference. They fought hard at Ole Miss last season keeping the game close in Oxford, Miss., until late in the fourth quarter before losing 49-27.

While Richardson, quarterback Connor Wood and the rest of the CU offense figure to be able to move the ball and score points after producing 34 of the team's 41 points last week, the defense will face a big test and an entirely different one than it confronted against the Rams.

Central Arkansas is led by senior quarterback Wynrick Smothers, who was named Player of the Year in the Southland Conference last season. Smothers directs an offense CU coach

Mike MacIntyre compared to Oregon this week because of both the spread style and tempo the Bears play.

"He's got tremendous escapability and will make a lot of plays with his feet," CU defensive coordinator Kent Baer said of Smothers. "He throws the ball extremely well. He's got good vision. He knows the offense. He's done it for awhile. So he's the guy."

Smothers spreads the ball around and operates much of the time in four-wide receiver looks.

MacIntyre and Baer have focused on tackling since the start of spring ball because the Buffs didn't tackle well last season and they are scheduled to face eight teams this season than run spread offenses where players are often in one-on-one situations in space. Tackling has been at the top of the defense's to-do list this week.

"I think it's the most important thing that we have to do this week is be technically sound, play our game and have our fundamentals down," true freshman middle linebacker Addison Gillam said.

Gillam, a jewel MacIntyre plucked from the mountains of Northern California, led the Buffs in tackles in his college debut last week. He finished with 14 total stops, but acknowledged he has never played against an opponent with talent of Smothers.

In addition to tackling well, the CU defense must communicate well and get lined up correctly on each play against an up-tempo offense that hopes to run between 90 and 100 plays a game.

"Even since the spring game I feel like we're leveraging the ball way better, breaking down and actually swarming to the ball," Gillam said. "The whole team is running to the ball so I feel like it's a lot better than even what it was in the spring."

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

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Hopes high for Bears against Buffalo herd

Posted: September 6, 2013 - 11:21pm



By David McCollum
LOG CABIN STAFF WRITER

First-year Colorado football coach Mike Macintyre has been on the biting end of an underdog.

A couple of years ago, he was coaching at Temple, a team that was 0-7 and had earlier been routed, 44-7, by William & Mary. Temple was a 36-point underdog to 7-0 Virginia Tech.

"We went there to play them and we upset them on homecoming and I realized right then and there that anybody can beat anybody on any given day," said

MacIntyre, a 22-year coaching veteran, during his weekly news conference this week. "And we outplayed them, outthusted them, outscraped them, stopped them on a fourth down goal-line stand. From then on, I realized anybody can beat anybody on a given day because when we got beat by William & Mary a few weeks before, 44-7, and we played more like Mary than we did like William that day and we ended up beating Virginia Tech two weeks later. So I never take or will ever allow any of our players to take anything lightly or our coaching staff."

The Buffaloes, a one-win team a year ago that prompted a coaching change, take on the University of Central Arkansas Saturday night in Boulder. Buoyed by seven Football Championship Subdivision teams defeating Football Bowl Subdivision teams last weekend (including conference champions of a year ago, Oregon State and Kansas State going down), the Bears and Bear fans have for weeks held hopes of an benchmark victory over the Pac-12 opponents.

Colorado's season-opening, 41-27 victory over Colorado State on Sunday threw a caution flag into those hopes.

"It's a different team and a different culture and different schemes and their players seemed to be engaged and more focused," said UCA coach Clint Conque. "It will be a huge challenge in all three phases. I don't think any FCS teams is going to sneak up on anybody this week."

MacIntyre echoed that.

"I think for their (the Bears') situation, they're going to get to play in front of a big crowd, They're going to get to play on a national television audience (Pac-12 TV) and I think that's a big deal for them. I coached in FCS (UT Martin) for six years of my life and I enjoyed every moment of it and to me I felt no different when we beat

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Murray State than when we beat Colorado State and that was our big rival. I mean that because you put the same amount of time, the same heart ... all the kids are giving all they have. They're just not as many people watching but when you get in between those white lines it's game on and it's a passionate awesome time."

MacIntyre added, "I think also some of those FCS teams, they don't have as many scholarships so a lot of those kids play younger and they stay the whole time so they (the Bears) have a senior quarterback (Wynrick Smothers). He was player of the year in his conference last year and he was a junior so now he's back again. They just have so much experience and have had so many reps they've played in so many games and their own team ends up happening like that. I think that's why you see that happening and some the FBS schools graduate some guys and you might have a younger team than the FCS school coming in."

Since they have been in NCAA Division I, the Bears have been competitive against FBS teams, including leading Ole Miss at the half last season and taking the game deep into the third quarter before the Rebels pulled away.

"You want to take the game into the fourth quarter with an opportunity to win," said Conque, who has a deep team with 16 returning starters. "Our players are embracing the challenge. But we are going to have to play well, limit turnovers and win the kicking game."

MacIntyre has been high in his praise for the Bears.

"Central Arkansas, I'm telling you and I am not blowing smoke, is fifth in the country and has one of the best quarterbacks (Smothers) in the FCS," he said at his news conference. "He's the best in their league and they can run. They're quick and athletic. And they're a spread football team, throwing it and doing and running options, so they're going to have us in space so we're going to have to leverage the football and tackle really, really well in open space. It's going to get a great test for us."

In order to get somewhat acclimated to the altitude and drier air, the Bears traveled to Colorado Thursday, a day earlier than normal. Conque said there will be oxygen available for the players although the effects of a higher altitude varies by player. The coaches have stressed hydration throughout the week.

"Another concern is logistics," he said. "Since we don't have much time for practice in Colorado, we had to have all the details of our game plan and pretty much do all our preparations before we left."

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