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A Buffs' bowl win has legs

History shows that bowl success has a carryover effect on the following season opener.

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Benefit bumps in recruiting and fundraising derived from winning a midlevel bowl game can be difficult to quantify. But at least for Colorado, momentum gained — or lost — does appear to carry over on the playing field.

The Buffaloes stand 9-2-1 in season openers that followed a victory in a bowl game. They have suffered a 6-8-1 hangover in openers after finishing the previous season with a bowl loss.

Colorado (6-6, 4-4 Big 12) plays Alabama (6-6, 4-4 Southeastern Conference) on Dec. 30 in the Independence Bowl at Shreveport, La.

"You never like to go out on a losing note," CU coach Dan Hawkins said Saturday after a 90-minute practice. "You'd love to carry over some good feelings from the last season."

Colorado hopes to build on momentum from its

65-51 victory over Nebraska that ended the regular season with smiles and handshakes. The Buffs had lost four of their previous five games and needed to beat the Cornhuskers to become eligible for a bowl.

Alabama will try to end a four-game losing streak that completed the Crimson Tide's first year under coach Nick Saban. Alabama had its bright moments, defeating Arkansas and Tennessee. But the season-ending slide included a shocking 21-14 loss at home to Louisiana-Monroe.

"This is a great opportunity for our seniors to change the tide of how the season ended," Saban said during a recent Independence Bowl teleconference.

Recruiting weekend.

According to Rivals.com, at least seven prospects were scheduled to tour the CU campus this weekend on official visits.

Those include five players who made an oral commitment to other programs but are reconsidering following a coaching change: Mullen offensive lineman Bryce Givens (Nebraska); defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore (Texas A&M) of Weatherford, Texas; linebacker Doug Ripsey (Nebraska) of Trotwood, Ohio; defensive end Josh Williams (Nebraska) of Denton, Texas; and defensive back E.J. Woods (UCLA) of Encino, Calif.

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Donnell Leomiti, a former CU safety who has served the past two seasons on Hawkins' staff as a defensive technical intern, will start his first full-time coaching job at CSU-Pueblo following the Independence Bowl. CSU-Pueblo (formerly Southern Colorado) will return to the field in 2008 after a 23-year hiatus. Former Colorado assistant John Wristen is the head coach, and ex-Buffs quarterback Mike Moschetti the offensive coordinator. "It's exciting that we're going to build a program from the ground up," said Leomiti, who will coach the defensive secondary. It's not often that a prized recruit leaves the state of Nebraska, especially an offensive lineman. But Trevor Robinson, a 6-foot-6, 304-pound guard from Omaha's Elkhorn High School, switched to Notre Dame on Friday after having orally committed to the Huskers in April. Like Mullen's Givens, Robinson is a four-star member of Rivals.com's national top-100 list (all positions). "It's not like I don't like being at home. I'm just ready for something new," Robinson told Rivals.com. CU players will practice today, then are off until Friday. CU's bowl media day is set for Tuesday.

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Bufs juggling football, exams

Hawkins takes different pre-bowl game approach than did Barnett

By Kyle Ringo

Sunday, December 16, 2007

When he brought his team together in front of a group of recruits after Saturday's early-morning practice, Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins began his remarks with "School, school, school."

Saturday was the first day of final exams and Hawkins wanted to emphasize the importance of finishing the fall semester strong in the classroom. But Hawkins also is keeping his players more focused on football than veteran members of the team were in the past during seasons in which they played in bowl games under former coach Gary Barnett.

Nearly everything football-related was optional at this time of year under Barnett. Players were not required to lift weights, run or practice during finals week or the week leading up to it. They were allowed to be exclusively focused on their school work.

Players are doing it all in their first bowl experience under Hawkins, including participating in player-organized, seven-on-seven work several times during the week after completing their running regimen with strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman.

Senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague said attendance at the seven-on-seven work during the week has fluctuated and often depends on how much running they do for Pitman beforehand.

The difference in philosophy has been met with mixed reviews by players who have experienced both approaches. The one positive players see in continuing to work out, run and practice is the feeling they will be better prepared for the game when they face Alabama on Dec. 30 in the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La.

The outcome will mean the difference between a winning and losing season with the Buffs at 6-6 going into the game. It also sets the tone for the next season. The Buffs are 9-2-1 in season openers the year after winning a bowl game. They are 6-8-1 in season openers after losing a bowl game.

"We're busting it here," Sprague said. "This game is really important to us. Ever since Day One that you walk on this campus when you take the responsibility of being a student-athlete, you've got to learn how to take care of both things at the same time.

"Some of these freshmen are learning to grow up fast and prepare for finals as well as getting everything done."

Hawkins has scheduled practices only on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays so far this month in an effort

to give players the week to focus on studying. It also has allowed coaches to use the work week to focus on recruiting. He said the approach has worked well in the past during four bowl years at Boise State.

"I guess everybody has got their own formula, but I think the way we've done it has always kept them fresh," Hawkins said. "Thinking about their grades and their health and their minds has just been a good combination."

Alabama coach Nick Saban has taken an approach more in line with what Barnett did. The Crimson Tide will conduct its first bowl practice today in Tuscaloosa. It will be the first time Alabama players have been on the football field since losing at Auburn on Nov. 24.

Some Colorado players prefer the old way.

"If I had it one way, I would go back to Barnett's way with everything being optional — optional lifts, optional run — and not even having practice," senior tailback Hugh Charles said. "I think it helps all around."

Charles said he does see a positive side in Hawkins' approach. He said in the past players have fallen out of shape and it has taken several practices to get back into a football mind set. He said that even happened to a lesser extent this year when the team was off for a week between the Nebraska victory and the beginning of bowl work. The first practice was "sloppy," he said.

"This is something new to everybody, especially the seniors," he said. "It's something we've got to deal with. It's coach Hawk's formula for going in and winning the game on the 30th.

"We've got to cope with it and move on."



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