



Woelk: Now, we'll see how Buffaloes handle success

In the relatively brief span of five weeks, we've learned a lot about the Colorado Buffaloes.

They don't quit. Down 28-17 to Colorado State, the Buffs came back to win in overtime. Down 24-7 to No. 3 Oklahoma, the Buffs rallied for a stunning 27-24 win.

Cody Hawkins can play. All the folks who said he was too short, too slow, didn't have a strong enough arm, blah blah blah, are suddenly silent after Hawkins led the Buffs in their improbable rally against the Sooners.

The defense is good. After fall practices, more than a few folks were worried that CU's defense would be a weak link. Now that the Buffs have put up defensive numbers not seen in these parts in a decade or more, those concerns have been muted. The folks who questioned coordinator Ron Collins are suddenly praising him.

Jeff Grimes can coach. Colorado's O-line play has improved — significantly — from week to week. Grimes has been a steadying influence, both fundamentally and emotionally. The players rave about his approach; the results were evident last week.

Brian Cabral can coach. OK, we already knew that. You don't turn out NFL-caliber linebackers on a regular basis and not know what you're doing. But fact is, Cabral might be doing one of his best jobs ever this season. Watch walk-on Jeff Smart play, and you see Cabral's influence.

Mark Helfrich has been right all along. CU's O-coordinator kept insisting that CU's offense would begin to click once players learned the system and performed their duties. There was no better example than CU's third touchdown last week, when the Buffs lined up in a formation they'd used a half-dozen times previously. Every time, they'd run the ball. But this time, Helfrich called a pass to Dusty Sprague, who was wide open in the end zone.

There are plenty more items to add to the list.

But the one thing we don't know about these Colorado Buffaloes is this:

How will they handle success?

This is, after all, a team that head coach Dan Hawkins wryly noted earlier in the week had a Ph.d in dealing with adversity.

But not since Hawkins' arrival have the Buffs had the opportunity to deal with even as much as a two-game win streak. Now, they are the toast of the CU campus. One player said earlier in the week that he and a couple of his teammates walked into class on Monday — and were greeted by a standing ovation.

That's uncharted territory for these Buffaloes. They've spent a week getting patted on the back, a week being told they were good (even receiving votes for the Top 25), and week watching their highlights on ESPN.

Today will be a test this team hasn't faced yet in the Hawkins era.

Certainly, Hawkins has been guarding against big heads and swollen egos all week.

On Sundays, CU's schedule usually consists of a team meeting that includes highlights and lowlights from the game the day before.

Last Sunday, Hawk brought his team together — and proceeded to show every overtime play from last year's triple-OT loss to Baylor. Nary a single play from the OU game was shown.

After the "show," one player said Hawkins simply looked at the team and said, "Any questions?"

There were none. And throughout the week, Hawkins has re-emphasized that message.

"It's about today, it's about this week, it's about getting better and improving and looking yourself in the mirror," Hawkins said. "If you are able to be disciplined enough to do that you can be at least as good as you can be. When you start looking further than that, you're taking your eyes off of what is really important."

One other factor worth noting: Once again, beating the Buffs could again be a feather in someone's cap. For the first time in the Hawkins era, they will be the hunted today, the team favored by more than a touchdown to win — on the road.

That's new territory.

We'll find out today how the Buffs deal with such unfamiliar surroundings.



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Bufs aim to end road skid at BU

CU 0-6 in true road games under Hawkins

By Kyle Ringo
Saturday, October 6, 2007

Leaving enemy territory with a pat on the back for fighting the good fight but an empty feeling in the pit of their stomachs from losing has become all too familiar to Colorado football players.

The Buffs are 0-6 under coach Dan Hawkins in true road games over the past 13 months. Their only victory outside Folsom Field since his arrival was a win in the season opener last month over Colorado State at Invesco Field.

The Buffs have gone nearly two calendar years since their last road win, a 23-20 victory at Kansas State on Oct. 29, 2005.

Colorado is coming off its biggest victory since beating Nebraska 62-36 in 2001. The Buffs upset then-No. 3 Oklahoma last week in Boulder, finally regaining some national respect after several turbulent and trying years.

But despite that benchmark win, the Buffs still have plenty to prove. If they lose today at Baylor, a program that has never enjoyed any consistent success in the Big 12 Conference, it wipes away any ground that had been gained last week.

The Buffs (3-2, 1-0) have a chance today to further prove they're on the upswing by beating a team they are supposed to beat and doubling their win total from last season in the process.

It doesn't hurt that losing to Baylor (3-2, 0-1) last season in triple overtime in Boulder has stuck with veteran members of this team as well as its head coach for a year. Hawkins called it the most painful setback of his career earlier this week and it was one of the most difficult for players to handle as well.

"I think some guys downstairs who played in that game are still pretty bitter about it," quarterback Cody Hawkins said.

After privately predicting victory for his team all last week, Dan Hawkins surprisingly wasn't asked for any predictions this week. But it is clear he is beginning to feel better about the way his players are able to perform in the system and the maturity they are showing, regardless of the result from week to week.

"Well we are much more seasoned, much more experienced, much more on the same page," Dan Hawkins said. "You know last year we were a team that was searching for ourselves, trying to find answers, trying to find the right formula, whereas this team, I think, understands the formula.

"But as I say all the time, the formula for success is not hard, it's pretty easy, actually. But following it, that's real hard, and that is where some people and some teams have a hard time."

Today the Buffs encounter the first of a handful of spread offenses they will see over the next five weeks. Baylor throws the ball between 40 and 50 times a game and looks to surprise its opponents with unexpected and somewhat unconventional running plays.

Quarterback Blake Szymanski has thrown a total of 14 touchdown passes to nine different receivers in his first five games. The sophomore needs just six more scoring passes this season to become the program's all-time single-season

leader.

He faces the 14th-ranked pass defense in the nation today, and the Buffs seem to be getting better each week. A defense that allowed opponents to complete 67 percent of their passes last season has trimmed that percentage to 49 percent so far this season and has been tough on third downs.

If the Buffs continue to improve defensively this week, it's difficult to imagine the Bears earning their third consecutive victory in the series. The Bears are coming off a humbling 34-10 defeat at Texas A&M in which they produced just 254 yards of total offense.

The Colorado offense could serve as perfect example to their counterparts on the opposite sideline today. The Buffs were not expected to be able to move the ball, let alone run it down Oklahoma's throat last week, but that is exactly what happened.

The Buffs racked up an improbable 161 yards on the ground last week, including the second straight 100-yard rushing performance for senior tailback Hugh Charles. He needs 89 rushing yards tonight to eclipse the 2,000-yard mark for his career.

Charles and the rest of the CU offense probably can't wait for the game to begin. Baylor is allowing 163 yards a game on the ground, including 352 rushing yards last week for the Aggies.

"He is vital to us," Cody Hawkins said. "I've seen his confidence improve every game and it's awesome because we know he has unlimited potential and Hugh is going to go as far as Hugh wants to go.

"It's definitely huge for us because everyone on the offense last year was a little disappointed in Hugh because he was such a great playmaker the two years before and the offense was kind of struggling and everyone was kind of wondering what is up with him."



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College football report, October 6

By **B.G. Brooks and Paul Willis (CU)**, **Randy Holtz (CSU)**, **Jim Benton (Air Force)** and wire services (Northern Colorado and Wyoming).

October 6, 2007

Contenders can't afford a second loss

Upsets last week have taken some of the luster off the schedule this week, but they didn't make the big games in Dallas and Baton Rouge, La., any less important.

Actually, those games are more crucial to the teams looking to bounce back. Remember, the national champion last season, Florida, lost a game, so one loss isn't necessarily a death sentence for title hopes.

Two losses, though, definitely are too many for a national championship contender.

As for those Gators, they visit Louisiana State for the Tigers' first game as the No. 1 team in The Associated Press Top 25 in almost half a century.

Since LSU last was No. 1, in November 1959, 31 teams have held the top spot in the AP poll, including seven of the current members of the Southeastern Conference (Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Auburn, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas, while in the Southwest Conference).

Tim Tebow and Florida lost to Auburn 20-17 last week. A win against LSU would go a long way toward making poll voters forget about that slip-up at home to those other Tigers. With another SEC loss, Urban Meyer's Gators not only would be out of national title contention, but they'd have a tough time getting back to the SEC title game.

In Dallas, both participants in the Red River Rivalry are coming off surprising, and a bit puzzling, upsets.

Texas was pounded 41-21 at home by Kansas State. Oklahoma blew a 17-point lead in the second half and lost 27-24 at Colorado. For the first time since 1999, the Sooners and Longhorns both lost the week before they played each other.

Consider this a national championship elimination game, though Texas hardly has played like a team that should even be in the conversation.

There would be no better way for the Longhorns to right themselves than by making it three straight wins against the Sooners. The winner of this game usually represents the Big 12 South in the conference title game. Not last season, though. The Sooners rebounded and didn't lose another game and the Longhorns lost two straight to end the regular season.

CU

Last things first

The Buffaloes did an about-face in watching tape this week.

Rather than beginning their weekly study with a correct-and-review of their 27-24 win against Oklahoma, coach **Dan Hawkins** showed them lowlights from their 34-31 triple-overtime loss to Baylor last season.

The unspoken message: Beating the Sooners was a nice step, but it already has been taken. There's more work to be done.

Said quarterback **Cody Hawkins**: "Showing us the Baylor clips before the Oklahoma clips really got us ready and showed us that, 'Hey, this is a new week and we know what we need to do.' "

'Dream come true'

For three frustrating weeks, **Kai Maiava** waited on the sideline. The true freshman had been told he was next in line to make an appearance on the Buffs' offensive line, but he didn't make it onto the field.



Sam Bradford

But two weeks ago, against Miami (Ohio), Maiava finally got on the field. And he was so impressive that he supplanted **Wes Palazzi** at left guard against OU.

"It's just felt good overall just to get out on the field. And to start, that was just a dream come true for me," Maiava said Wednesday. "Especially against a team like that."

Fellow freshman **Ryan Miller**, from Columbine High School, also has been in the rotation the past two weeks, at right tackle. He and Maiava are expected to remain in their respective roles for the foreseeable future.

"Ryan and I try to keep each other relaxed, because we know we're in the same boat," Maiava said.

Etc.

- Baylor is 2-3 vs. CU in Big 12 Conference competition, with its two wins coming in the two most recent meetings.
- CU limited Oklahoma to a season-low 230 yards in total offense, with half that yardage coming on four plays.

Numbers game

0:00**was the time** of CU's first lead against Oklahoma. It set a school record for least amount of time the Buffs led in a game and still won. The previous mark: 12 seconds vs. Stanford on Sept. 6, 1990.

He said it

"That's what great people do and great teams do. You don't walk away saying, 'Oh, yeah, look at me, wasn't I special?' You walk away and go, 'What can I get better at?' "

Dan Hawkins, CU coach

CSU

Aztecs defenseless

San Diego State's young defense has been overmatched in the Aztecs' first four games, SDSU ranking 118th among the 119 major college teams in total defense.

Through four games, CSU's opponent today is yielding 535 yards a game. Only North Texas of the Sun Belt Conference, allowing 580 yards a game, has given up more.

Coach **Chuck Long** said the biggest problem has been his team's performance once an opponent reaches the red zone.

"We have struggled at times with our red-zone defense," the second-year Aztecs coach said. "We've tried just about every blitz there is and we've used a lot of our base packages to mix things up. We've been trying to get our hands on something that will work.

"We see signs, especially in the second half of games, of our guys getting better."

Among San Diego State's starters on defense, two are redshirt freshmen - linebacker **Andrew Preston** and rover **B.J. Williams**. On the Aztecs' two-deep defense, 10 of the 22 players are true freshmen, redshirt freshmen or sophomores.

Etc.

- Basketball fans are invited to "10-o'clock Rock," with CSU's men's and women's basketball teams staging their first official practices of the season at 10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 18, at Moby Arena. Each team will take part in a scrimmage and a three-point shootout in addition to participating with younger fans in on-floor contests.
- With eight touchdown passes in four games, San Diego State already has matched the 2006 total it had in its first season under Long. . . . The **Kawulok** brothers of Boulder will meet for the second time on the college level. **Chris Kawulok**, a junior, became CSU's starting tight end when **Kory Sperry** was injured. Brother **Matthew**, a sophomore, is listed as the No. 2 tight end for San Diego State behind starter **Steve Schmidt**. The Kawuloks graduated from Monarch High.