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cu 43, baylor 23

It's all CU, all night long

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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WACO, Texas - The only reason for Colorado coach Dan Hawkins to stay late in his office after facing Baylor this time would have been to celebrate.

That's not Hawkins' nature, of course. Even after a relatively easy 43-23 victory over the Bears on Saturday night, Hawkins no doubt has already turned his thoughts toward the next challenge, a road game against Kansas State. But unlike a year ago, any review of this Baylor film will be enjoyable to watch.

Following CU's triple-overtime loss to Baylor last October in Boulder, Hawkins sent his assistants home and pulled an all-nighter at his desk - for the only time in his 24-year coaching career. In this game, the Buffaloes made sure early that Hawkins had no need for

Colorado Football

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a cot.

"I will not be sleeping in the office," Hawkins said. "I told the guys, 'I had my pain last year.'"

Colorado, which won only twice last year in Hawkins' inaugural season at Colorado, improved to 4-2, 2-0 in the Big 12 Conference. The Buffs remained atop the Big 12's North Division standings.

"There's a lot of football ahead, but that's where we want to be," said George Hypolite, CU's junior defensive tackle.

Colorado silenced a crowd of 32,276 in Floyd Casey Stadium with a 20-point flurry in the second quarter that put the visitors up 30-9 at halftime.

CU redshirt freshman quarterback Cody Hawkins must have made his dad feel proud - and relieved. After two quarters, Cody had

already passed for 177 yards and two touchdowns. He finished with 293 yards on 17-of-26 passing, and threw just one meaningless interception late in the game. already passed for 177 yards and two touchdowns. He finished with 293 yards on 17-of-26 passing, and threw just one meaningless interception late in the game.

It wasn't a perfect game, Dan Hawkins told the team afterward. He pointed out CU's offense

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having to settle for five Kevin Eberhart field goals, including a career-best 54-yarder that ended the first half. And the Buffs defense did yield 465 yards.

But this marked the first true road victory with Dan Hawkins as Colorado's coach. This season's opening-game win over Colorado State was played at Invesco Field at Mile High, a neutral site.

The Buffs extended their winning streak to three games. And in jumping to a 21-point halftime lead, they showed no letdown after the previous weekend's victory over then-No. 3 Oklahoma. Dating back to 1986, the Buffs improved to 19-4 in games after defeating a top-25 team.

Baylor dropped to 3-3 and 0-2 in league play.

"It's like I told the team in there, we're always searching for that perfect tapestry," Dan Hawkins said. "But, trust me, there were a lot of teams today that had ugly losses. The fact that you come on the road, when you haven't won on the road, and score 43 (points) and win by 20 and say, 'Dang!' - that's probably a good sign for a team."

Colorado's defense appeared well-prepared for Baylor's no-huddle spread offense. The Buffs retaliated by employing one or two extra defensive backs, taking out interior defensive linemen or linebackers. Clogging the passing lanes, Colorado intercepted two Blake Szymanski passes and forced a fumble during the first half.

More than half of Szymanski's 410 passing yards came in the second half after CU had put the game out of reach.

"I think everybody was a little uptight and pressing a little too hard," Baylor coach Guy Morriss said of his team. "And (Colorado) put up points fast."

Capitalizing on an interception by CU defensive end Alonzo Barrett, Colorado jumped out to a 17-0 lead with 11:43 remaining before halftime when Cody Hawkins hit running back Demetrius Sumler for a 7-yard touchdown pass.

Sumler, a redshirt freshman, scored on a 3-yard run later in the second quarter to make it 24-3 and notched his third touchdown with a 2-yard run with 6:08 left in the third quarter. The latter was set up by the longest play of the evening: a 65-yard pass from Hawkins to freshman speedster Josh Smith.

The Grades | By Tom Kensler

OFFENSE

B: Lots of completions by redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins and enough running to keep Baylor's defense guessing. The Buffaloes appear to be gaining confidence each week. Having to settle for field goals too often keeps this from a perfect score.

DEFENSE

B: Baylor's spread offense is going to get

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yardage and some big plays. But while sometimes using three defensive linemen, the Buffs eliminated Baylor's running game and put enough pressure on quarterback Blake Szymanski. That's no small feat.

SPECIAL TEAMS

A: Five field goals by Kevin Eberhart, including a career-long 54-yarder, and a nice bonus - a 42-yard punt return by senior Stephone Robinson of Mullen High School.

OVERALL

A: The Buffs took care of business on the road when there was every opportunity for a letdown after a signature win over Oklahoma a week earlier.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

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cu football notes

Charles climbs career rushing ladder

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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WACO, TEXAS - Colorado senior tailback Hugh Charles recorded the eighth 100-yard game of his career and became the 16th player in school history to surpass 2,000 rushing yards for his career. But afterward, Charles was more pleased that the Buffaloes were able to get their running game going in the second half.

Charles rushed for 88 of his 122 yards after the break.

"We're not going to be able to win without running the ball, and Coach (Dan) Hawkins told us at halftime that we were going to run," Charles said. "And we did."

The Keller, Texas, native reached the century mark for the third consecutive game. He has 2,034 yards for his career, passing four players on Saturday night, including his position coach, Darian Hagan (2,007 yards rushing from 1988-91).

"I've been fortunate to get the opportunity to set

records for Colorado," Charles said modestly.

Giving it the boot. With five field goals, Kevin Eberhart tied a CU record set in 1999 by Jeremy Aldrich against Kansas.

Eberhart's 54-yarder as time expired in the first half shattered his career long, topping his 45-yard game-winner against Oklahoma. Eberhart said the 54-yarder was not his best kick of the day.

"I had some help from behind," Eberhart said of a tailwind. "But I got enough of it. You need some of those."

Footnotes. Colorado snapped a seven-game road losing streak, dating to a 23-20

win at Kansas State on Oct. 29, 2005. ... CU was able to use the trip to scout high school players in the talent-rich state. CU's Hagan was spotted Friday in Dallas. ... Two Colorado seniors, wide receiver-punt returner Chase McBride and tight end Tyson DeVree, were unavailable for the game. McBride suffered a shoulder sprain during Wednesday's practice. DeVree had a recurrence of a concussion in the victory over Oklahoma. ... Wide receiver-returner Stephone Robinson (X-rays negative on a leg contusion) and safety Jalil Brown (concussion) suffered the most notable injuries. Their availability this week is day to day.... win at Kansas State on Oct. 29, 2005. ... CU was able to use the trip to scout high school players in the talent-rich state. CU's Hagan was spotted Friday in Dallas. ... Two Colorado seniors, wide receiver-punt returner Chase McBride and

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DeVree's absence enabled 6-foot-8 redshirt freshman tight end Nate Solder of Buena Vista to make his first career start. Solder, who did not catch a pass, was congratulated by teammates after an open-field tackle on kickoff coverage. ... True freshman tailback Brian Lockridge returned to action after missing the game against the Sooners. Lockridge ran three times for 15 yards and misfired on a trick play in the first half - a tailback pass intended for Dusty Sprague that was underthrown.

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Woelk: Buffaloes keep raising the bar

By Neill Woelk

Sunday, October 7, 2007

WACO, Texas — Colorado coaches wanted a perfect game.

They were happy to leave town with a win.

It might not have been the prettiest of efforts, and as CU coach Dan Hawkins loves to say, the Buffs left plenty on the table Saturday night — but the bottom line was a 43-23 win over Baylor, a three-game winning streak and a place all alone atop the Big 12 North standings.

That's a position not too many folks outside the Dal Ward Center expected Colorado to occupy two weeks into the Big 12 season.

"The fact that we won on the road, and won by 20, and people are going, 'Dang.' ... That's probably a good sign," CU coach Dan Hawkins said after the game.

Indeed. It would be hard to find a program at which the level of expectations has risen any more dramatically than they have at Colorado in the span of six short weeks.

When the season began, a win — any win, against anybody — would have been enough to satisfy most folks, including plenty of people inside the CU locker room.

But now the bar has been raised. The Buffs honest-to-goodness believe they can — make that should — win the Big 12.

"It's funny — you could tell people were a little disappointed in the locker room," said Buff senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley. "We'll enjoy the win. We're glad we won. But we expect a lot more out of ourselves now. We want to play a perfect game every time we walk out on the field."

The Buffs were by no means perfect on this hot, muggy Texas night. The defense yielded 410 yards passing to the Bears' spread offense — not totally unexpected, but nevertheless nothing to write home about. The defense also missed more tackles in one game than maybe the rest of the season combined.

Neither did the offense put on a display of crisp efficiency. On two consecutive series in the first quarter, the Buffs took over deep in Baylor territory thanks to an interception and big punt return — and reaped exactly three points.

Those are usually the kinds of things that will drive detail-oriented Dan Hawkins crazy. Instead, Hawkins after the game found himself in the role of keeping his players' spirits up.

This after a 20-point win. On the road. Against a Big 12 opponent.

Think about that for just a second. The team that won exactly two games a year ago, the team nobody picked to finish any better than fifth out of sixth in the Big 12 North, walked away feeling just a little bit less than satisfied after a 20-point win.

"I think that says a lot about this program," said assistant head coach Jeff Grimes. "Yes, we could've played better. We didn't play as clean or crisp as we could have.

"But we won by 20 and the players know we could have done better. If we can be a little frustrated about how we won ... well, that might not be too bad a sign for the program."

This was a game that had CU coaches worried. Fact is, they had to do as good a job of coaching before the Baylor game as they did before the Oklahoma contest, for completely different reasons. The Baylor contest was a trap waiting to be sprung — in fact, one national sports network expert did say he thought Baylor might win.

There is some merit to that kind of thinking. The Buffs had just completed a rugged first month of the schedule, a stretch that included an overtime win over in-state rival Colorado State, tough losses to Arizona State and Florida State, and a heart-stopping win over No. 3 Oklahoma.

It would not have been out of the question for the Buffs to experience an emotional and physical letdown. It would have been natural.

But Hawkins wouldn't let them get to that point.

Now, what's becoming apparent is that these Buffs are proving that they not only listen to Hawkins and his staff, but they believe.

"I think believing is seeing," Hawkins said. "To some people, seeing is believing. But these guys see what we can do, and they believe it."

Right now, the Buffs see no reason to think they can't keep on winning. They've set the bar high.

"We expect to win every game from here on out," said quarterback Cody Hawkins.

That's true. A quick look at the schedule offers no team the Buffs can't beat. The flip side, of course, is that there's no team on the schedule that can't beat Colorado — beginning with next week's opponent, Kansas State.

But right now, the Buffs believe in themselves. They're playing with confidence, and they're not happy with a 20-point win when they know they made plenty of mistakes.

That kind of thinking just might reap something worth seeing before this season is finished.



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CU bears down

Bufs earn first road win under Hawkins

By Kyle Ringo
Sunday, October 7, 2007

WACO, Texas — Dan Hawkins was not a happy man for much of Saturday night, compulsively raking his fingers through his hair as he paced the sideline like a junkyard dog patrolling a fence line in Floyd Casey Stadium.

And his team was running away with a victory over the Baylor Bears.

But it was ugly. Anyone-who-bought-a-ticket-knew-why-it-wasn't-televised ugly.

The Buffs trounced the Bears 43-23 while making a slew of mistakes and wasting great field position on several occasions that could have led to more points and wider margin of victory. The defense also loosened up late in the game, allowing the Bears to score several times in what was a bigger blowout.

"If you walked into the locker room, you'd think we just lost," quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "How many times do you win by 20 points and everybody is kicking themselves in the foot and throwing their helmets on the ground cause of woulda, coulda, shoulda?"

"I think that's what you want to have because you want to expect perfection in every game."

Yet the Buffs were able to put the euphoria of last week's big win over Oklahoma behind them and handle their business with the Bears.

The Buffs snapped a seven-game road-losing streak and won for the first time on the road in Hawkins' tenure as coach. They did so despite making a slew of mistakes that would have cost them dearly against a better opponent or against any opponent last season when they were rebuilding.

They also committed a season-worst 11 penalties for 105 yards.

But winning a game despite those mistakes in hostile territory marked another step forward for a team that sits atop the Big 12 Conference North Division this morning. The Buffs doubled their win total from last season and at 4-2 overall, and 2-0 in the Big 12 could be headed for one of the more remarkable turnarounds in college football this season.

"We are on the way to becoming something good," said cornerback Terrence Wheatley, who played Saturday despite suffering from the flu. "We've just got to focus on getting better."

There seemed to be plenty of room for improvement even though the Buffs scored on their first drive and led the rest of the way. CU settled for six field-goal attempts from place-kicker Kevin Eberhart because it couldn't push the ball into the end zone.

Eberhart made five of those field goals, including a career-best 54-yarder. Eberhart tied the school record for made field goals in one game set by Jeremy Aldrich against Kansas in 1999.

Colorado scored on its first possession in surprise fashion by featuring fifth-year senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague, who had caught eight passes for 93 yards all season. He caught three passes on the drive for 81 yards, including a 26-

yard touchdown pass on a post pattern.

That pass play was a single moment of beauty in what was otherwise a forgettable first half. In the first 30 minutes alone, the teams combined for 10 penalties, three fumbles, two interceptions, a missed field goal, a missed extra point and three what-in-the-world-is-going-on-out-there timeouts.

"We're always searching for that perfect tapestry," coach Dan Hawkins said. "But, trust me, there are a lot of teams today that had ugly losses. So the fact that you come on the road and haven't won on the road, score 43 and win by 20 and you're going, 'Dang.' Tat's probably a good sign."

Colorado scored 20 points in the second quarter on two short touchdown runs by tailback Demetrius Sumler and a pair of field goals from Eberhart. Interceptions by linebacker Jordon Dizon and defensive end Alonzo Barrett led to some of those points.

The Buffs led 30-9 at halftime and were booed off the field after safety D.J. Dykes made a heady play by sprinting 30 yards to catch a short punt and ensure Eberhart an opportunity to try the 54-yard field goal with 4 seconds showing.

The Buffs turned to senior tailback Hugh Charles in the second half and he answered the call, producing his third consecutive 100-yard game. Charles ran 20 times for 122 yards, becoming the 16th player in school history to rush for 2,000 yards in his career.

Baylor had its moments against a tough CU defense that suddenly is having more luck producing turnovers. The Bears produced plays of 62 and 33 yards and found holes in CU's 14th-ranked pass defense on their way to 410 passing yards.

Baylor quarterback Blake Szymanski threw 60 passes, completing 36 of them for 410 yards a touchdown and two interceptions. Szymanski connected with Justin Akers on an 18-yard touchdown at the end of the third quarter and he led the Bears to another score with five minutes remaining in the game.

The final play of the contest featured Szymanski hitting an open receiver in the end zone with a pass that was dropped. It was a perfect example of where the Bears stand now and where the Buffs once used to be.

"It was good to see the team come out and take care of business," defensive tackle George Hypolite said.



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Baylor LB's comments stoke fire for Buffs

By Kyle Ringo

Sunday, October 7, 2007

WACO, Texas — The Colorado Buffaloes didn't need any further motivation to come to the heart of Texas and dismantle Baylor on Saturday after losing to the Bears a year ago in triple overtime in Folsom Field.

But Baylor linebacker Joe Pawelek, who sealed last season's win with an interception, provided it anyway. Pawelek managed to offend the Buffs in the week leading up to the game by telling a Texas newspaper he saw the Buffs as the same team he beat last year.

CU quarterback Cody Hawkins received a copy of the article in his e-mail during the week and left it displayed on computers in the team locker room for all his teammates to read.

Senior linebacker Jordon Dizon, a team captain, also read Pawelek's statements to his team after Thursday's practice.

"We know coming in it's pretty much the same (Buffaloes') team, except for their change at quarterback," Pawelek told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. "But it's pretty much the same team.

"And we all know that we beat them up in their place last year. So we know coming in that we do have the upper hand on them."

The Buffs, who talk constantly about not needing such things to inspire them, apparently couldn't help using Pawelek's fuel for their fire. And after beating the Bears on Saturday, senior tackle Tyler Polumbus was seen on the field handing Pawelek a copy of the article.

The clincher

Colorado linebacker Jordon Dizon had done just about everything there is to do on a football field prior to Saturday except serve as any kind of kicker or intercept a pass.

The interception thing has been bothering him. Having never made one at any level of football, including a few dropped opportunities through the years, he really wanted one.

It finally came against the Baylor Bears in the sixth game of his senior season at CU on Saturday in the first quarter of a blowout victory at Floyd Casey Stadium.

Dizon sprinted to catch a pass from Baylor quarterback Blake Szymanski that had been tipped into the air in the middle of the field. He reached it in full stride almost falling down as he caught it. Dizon managed to keep his balance and almost scored on the play but was tracked down from behind at the Bears' 9-yard line.

"I better catch the ball. It was floating in the air," Dizon said. "We had fun with it and it came at the right time for me."

Dizon's interception was one of three turnovers for the Buffs in Saturday's win. After forcing only four turnovers in the first four games of the season, the Buffs have now come up with six turnovers in the past two weeks.

Adventures in returns

Senior Stephone Robinson was set to handle the punt return duties Saturday after regular return man Chase McBride suffered an shoulder injury during practices. Robinson took the first Baylor punt of the day and returned it 42 yards, narrowly missing his third career punt return for a touchdown.

Robinson was injured later in the half after catching a pass from Cody Hawkins as a wide receiver, which forced safety D.J. Dykes into duty as punt returner.

Like Robinson, Dykes has previous experience as a solid punt returner from his time at Idaho. All Dykes did in his first opportunity was sprint 30 yards to get into position to catch a short punt at the end of the half, setting up place-kicker Kevin Eberhart's 54-yard field goal to close the first half.

Friend of the program

Michael Knorps, the CU freshman student who was stabbed in the neck on the first day of fall classes, traveled with the team to Baylor and watched the game from the sideline.

Knorps formed a bond with the football team when players and coaches made a point of reaching out to him after he was attacked. He has been a sideline guest several times this season, including the win over Colorado State when he stood on the podium during the trophy presentation with coach Dan Hawkins and members of the team.

On the trail

Coach Dan Hawkins did not travel with the team to Waco on Friday. He and several of his assistants made recruiting trips prior to joining the rest of the staff and players at the team hotel late Friday night.

Sources said Hawkins was in Utah recruiting. Several recruiting services list a handful of Utah prep stars as CU prospects, including Lewis Walker, a 6-foot cornerback from Salt Lake City, Rhen Richard, a quarterback from Roosevelt, Utah, David Kruger, a four-star defensive tackle from Orem, Utah, and Sausan Shakerin, a four-star running back from Sandy, Utah.

CU has only seven known commitments for the 2008 class with less than four months remaining before signing day.

Notable

Senior cornerback and kickoff return man Terrence Wheatley served as special teams captain with R.J. Brown missing his third straight game because of a series of concussions. Senior running back Hugh Charles also served as a team captain for the first time this season. Wheatley and Charles both grew up in Texas and were rewarded with the opportunity to serve as captains in what could have been their final college games in their home state. ... Running back Cory Nabors played for the first time in his career on kickoff coverage. Defensive lineman Eric Lawson also saw the first action of his career late in the game.



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Eberhart boots five FGs for CU

Bufs kicker ties school record

By Neill Woelk

Sunday, October 7, 2007

WACO, Texas — As Colorado kicker Kevin Eberhart was warming up before Saturday's game against Baylor, a Bears fan leaned over the railing and hollered, "Hey, No. 39. You're no Mason Crosby."

Eberhart, who knew going into this season that he had a big tee to fill, probably didn't even hear the jibe.

But what that fan saw before the night was over was CU's kicker do something that even the legendary Crosby didn't do — kick five field goals in a game. Eberhart hit kicks of 41, 44, 42, 30 and a career-best 54 yards in a 43-23 win over the Bears, tying the school record for field goals in one game set by Jeremy Aldrich against Kansas in 1999.

Eberhart actually had a chance to kick six. But he missed his first try, a 36-yard attempt in the first quarter that went wide right.

It followed a pattern that Eberhart has been trying to kick all year — that of missing a kick early, then making another later in the game. He missed one against Colorado State, but then booted through the game-tying kick late in the fourth quarter and the game-winner in overtime. He then missed two against Florida State, and another last week against Oklahoma — only to provide the second game-winner of his career as time expired.

That 45-yarder against the Sooners was his career long until Saturday.

"Unfortunately, that's been kind of my forte," the Broomfield High School product said. "That's something I've got to deal with. There's going to be a time when it's an important kick early and it might be more costly. You never know when you're going to get another chance."

Not that CU's coaches are overly worried. As head coach Dan Hawkins noted, "He's never really hit a bad ball. If you did that in golf, you'd be in the fairway every time."

Eberhart's 54-yarder, which came just as the first half came to an end tied for the 11th-longest in CU history. It was also the longest by any Buff other than Crosby since 1993, when Mitch Berger hit a 54-yarder against Miami.

"It didn't surprise me, but it wasn't my best ball," Eberhart said. "Sometimes you hit really great balls that don't go through, and sometimes you hit some you wish you had back that do go through. I just have to keep working to become more consistent."

Eberhart closely analyzes film from every kick.

"Sometimes you see something you can correct — and sometimes you don't see anything," he said.

Seven Buffs have kicked at least four field goals in one game. Eberhart joined that list that also includes Crosby, Aldrich, Mark Zetterberg, Tom Field and Jeremy Flores. He's also only the second Buff kicker to make at least four in one game from 40 yards or farther, with Aldrich being the other.



Sprague coming on strong for CU

Senior receiver catches five passes for 95 yards

By Neill Woelk

Sunday, October 7, 2007

WACO, Texas — When the season started, Dusty Sprague could have been considered the forgotten man among the Colorado receiving corps.

Throughout fall camp, the chatter centered mostly on CU's incoming freshmen, in particular Josh Smith and Kendrick Celestine. Sprague, a senior who caught just 11 passes all of last season, found himself virtually off the radar. CU's receiving corps was considered to be a weak spot a year ago, and the general consensus was that it would take new blood to put some spark in the passing game.

But while lots of folks wrote Sprague off, he refused to read the writing on the wall.

And, in the last couple of weeks, Sprague has popped back up on the radar of Buff quarterback Cody Hawkins in a big way. Sprague, whose touchdown catch against Oklahoma in the fourth quarter tied the game at 24-24 a week ago, followed that up with a five-catch, 95-yard effort Saturday against Baylor.

Sprague's night included a 26-yard touchdown catch on the opening drive, a reception that capped a seven-play, 82-yard drive for the Buffs in which Sprague caught three passes for 81 yards.

Now, halfway through the season, Sprague has already surpassed his numbers of a year ago, with 13 catches for 188 yards. His two touchdown catches are the most he's had in any one season at CU and match his career totals from his first three seasons.

"When you have a great program, you have the ebbs and flows," CU coach Dan Hawkins said. "Guys start buying into that and they wait for their time. They keep working hard and they know their time will come."

Sprague's time came in a hurry against the Bears. On the third play of CU's opening drive, he hauled in a 27-yard reception. He then picked up a 28-yarder two plays later, and finished the drive with the 26-yard touchdown catch.

"We're getting the job done as a group," Sprague said. "I'm really happy for everybody."

"On this team, you don't worry about your numbers. I was brought up to bring your lunch pail and go to work every day. When you work hard, you'll get rewarded. There's no success worth having that doesn't require hard work, and that's what you are seeing out here."

After the first drive, the Bears seemed to take notice of Sprague. He caught just two more passes the rest of the game — but it meant other open receivers. Smith, who didn't play in the first half, caught two long balls in the second half, including a 65-yarder, CU's longest play from scrimmage this season. Celestine also had a pair of catches for 31 yards, with Cody Hawkins throwing to eight different receivers in the game.

"We still left some things out there," Sprague said. "We did some good things, but we have to become a lot more efficient."

"I love (kicker) Kevin Eberhart, but five field goals is too many. We have to turn more of those into touchdowns."