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Work in progress

Colorado exceeding expectations but isn't satisfied just yet

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — Maybe the question we should contemplate as the Colorado Buffaloes enter the second half of 2007 isn't what needs improvement. Maybe we should ask: What doesn't?

The Buffs say they can do lots of things better: commit fewer penalties. Tackle better. Catch more passes. Fumble less. Make better throws. Convert more third downs. Increase the turnover margin. Score touchdowns in the red zone. Score on special teams. Eliminate missed assignments. The list goes on.

Coaches and players left their 20-point win Saturday at Baylor saying they did OK but are capable of so much more. Opportunity beckons. The second half of the schedule includes all five Big 12 North rivals, and three — Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska — come to Folsom Field. The Buffs have ample chance to show improvement.

But at 4-2 and 2-0 in the Big 12, they've surpassed the expectations of virtually everyone outside the program. They enter Saturday's game at Kansas State in contention for a bowl, a division title and a Big 12 championship. The next seven weeks should be fascinating.

If this keeps up, it'll be hard to deny that coach Dan Hawkins merits consideration for Big 12 coach of the year.

"I think our culture is really coming around, and I think it's really seeping through and there are so many instances of that in a lot of ways, like how they're responding in the training room and what they're getting done in the weight room," Hawkins said. "I couldn't be more happy with their attitude."

What would make Hawkins more happy? A few more wins, obviously. When the coach unveiled his disappointment following the loss to Florida State, he revealed some lofty expectations. Those were met Sept. 19 against Oklahoma.

The Buffs have beaten whom they should and pulled off a shocker against the then-No. 3 Sooners. They've played three teams that are ranked this week, and No. 11 Missouri and No. 20 Kansas await.

On the other hand, two of their wins came against sorry-looking teams in Baylor and Colorado State. There's an air of resignation around the Baylor program, and Colorado State has lost 12 in a row.

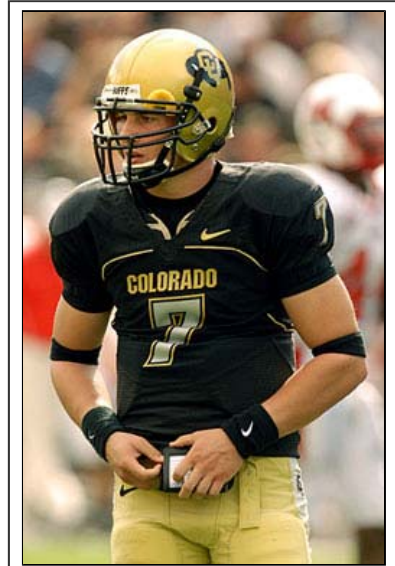
Big 12 statistics look like numbers from video games. They're posted by wide-open offenses against, in some cases, far inferior opponents. Therefore, they can be wildly misleading. But a few require attention.

On the positive side, CU's defense has sliced its completion rate from 67 percent a year ago to 53 percent through six games in 2007. That bodes well in the pass-happy Big 12.

Opponents are averaging 3.1 yards per carry. Only one back has topped 100 yards on the Buffs: CSU's Kyle Bell. And he needed 40 carries to do so. That three-game home stretch in which CU allowed 590 yards will give pause to any offense visiting Folsom Field this year.

Kicker Kevin Eberhart is 10-for-15 in the Big 12, but of more importance, his game-winners against CSU and Oklahoma showed an ability to perform in the clutch.

Meanwhile, CU is last in the league in third-down conversions on offense, 37.6 percent, and last in red-zone efficiency, with 19 scores — including 14 touchdowns — in 26 trips. Eberhart's six field goal attempts Saturday in Waco made that statistic glare. Depth at linebacker



University of Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins gets signals from the sideline at Folsom Field against Miami-Ohio on Sept. 22. Hawkins and the Buffs are 4-2 at the midway point of the season but know they have a lot of work to do to reach their goals. **Times-Call/Lewis Geyer**

is scarce, and inexperience remains all over the roster.

Quarterback Cody Hawkins has helped balance the offense. But the redshirt freshman also has tossed nine interceptions in six games. While some have been tipped and others were inconsequential, like the one he threw late Saturday, he will be the first one to tell you nine are too many. And he's also the first to say freshmen shouldn't turn their youth into excuses.

"Any interception is too many, just because it's the quarterback's job to take care of the football," Cody Hawkins said. "I don't think I can really use the freshman excuse anymore, because we've all played a lot of games. The same goes for any freshman playing right now. If Kai (Maiava) misses a block, he can't go, 'Oh, I'm a freshman.'

"We have to go out there and keep executing and take care of the ball and do our best to put the ball in the end zone."

Extra points: ABC has told the Big 12 it's using the first of three potential six-day selections for the league's Oct. 20 games. That means CU must wait until no later than noon Sunday to learn if its home game with Kansas has been selected by the network — or by FSN, ESPN or VERSUS — for television, and what time it'll start. ... The Big 12 chose Eberhart as its special teams player of the week on Monday. This is the second time he has won the honor in 2007. Eberhart made five field goals Saturday at Baylor.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

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College football report, October 9

By B.G. Brooks (CU), Randy Holtz (CSU) and Jim Benton (Air Force).
October 9, 2007

CU

Special, once more

It's now safe to say senior placement specialist **Kevin Eberhart** has kicked his way out of **Mason Crosby's** shadow.

After tying a school record with five field goals in Saturday's 43-23 win at Baylor, Eberhart was chosen the Big 12 Conference's special teams player of the week for the second time this season.

Eberhart, of Broomfield, made field goals of 41, 44, 54, 42 and 30 yards, with the 54-yarder serving as a career-long kick. He also was honored by the Big 12 after kicking the winning field goal in overtime against Colorado State.

Coach **Dan Hawkins** said Eberhart's success "isn't a surprise to anyone. . . . He's worked hard every week, and he worked hard last year. He was behind a great player (Crosby), but he was willing to deal with it and accept it."

Let's blog

Hawkins is writing an occasional Monday blog that reflects his thoughts on Buffaloes football and his philosophy on many other subjects such as the Rockies' success, his favorite movies and music, why he took his wife, **Misti**, to a recent ABBA concert at Red Rocks and more.

His take on the setting two weekends ago when Oklahoma visited Boulder and was beaten 27-24:

"It was a glorious fall afternoon at Folsom - a little bite to the air, leaves letting go of summer and bleeding into winter, a low sun, and plenty of emotion in the air. Competing against the No. 3 ranked team in the country, you have to feel blessed to be part of that!"

Asked on Monday's Big 12 conference call about his blogging, Hawkins said he wants to be a first-person voice in telling the Buffs' story.

"There's a bunch of (other) people who make a lot of money telling our story," he said, comparing it to "a musician who writes songs and somebody else plays them. "It's a chance for us to get our story, our side, out. It gives people a little different perspective - what I'm like, what's going on."

Thus far, he has blogged twice on CU's athletic Web site (CUBuffs.com), both times closing with: "Peace, Hawk."

Etc.

- The kickoff time and television plans for the CU-Kansas game on Oct. 20 won't be known until Sunday, when ABC notifies the Big 12 of its plans for that weekend.
- The win at Baylor improved CU to 20-15 against teams from the Big 12 South. The Buffs' most recent victory against a South team was 30-6 last season against Texas Tech.

Numbers game

22-8 **was Hawkins' road record** in five seasons at Boise State. He is 1-6 on the road in 1 1/2 seasons at CU.

CSU

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cu football notes

Cody has a fan at Kansas State

Freshman QB Hawkins draws admiration for "instincts, guts"

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 10/09/2007 12:31:17 AM MDT

An intangible allows young quarterbacks such at Colorado's Cody Hawkins to succeed. Kansas State coach Ron Prince calls it guts. Hawkins has it, he said, and so does Kansas State quarterback Josh Freeman, who set a school freshman record in 2006 with 1,780 yards passing yards.

Colorado (4-2, 2-0 Big 12) plays at Kansas State (3-2, 1-1) on Saturday night in a matchup of two of the league's best young quarterbacks.

"Cody has done a terrific job," Prince said on the Big 12 coaches' teleconference Monday. "You can see clearly that this young man understands the game of football. He's got the ability to throw the ball. He can throw it in tight places. A lot of quarterbacks won't make a contested throw early in their

Colorado Football

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career.

"He's a competitor. He's really making the thing tick for them."

Hawkins, a redshirt freshman and the elder son of CU coach Dan Hawkins, has thrown for 1,457 yards and 10 TDs.

Prince said intangibles are at the top of the list that enable a quarterback to win, and Hawkins has them.

"There are a lot of guys that have ability, and probably a few less that have knowledge," Prince said. "But when you have the kind of instincts and guts and toughness, these guys that can stand in there and deliver the ball when they may (get hit), that's what NFL quarterbacks do. We have some guys in this league who do that, and Cody is one of them."

Footnotes. For the second time this season,

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play Saturday at Nebraska. Robinson, a former Chatfield High School star, was hit hard in the fourth quarter of last weekend's 24-23 loss at Texas A&M and did not return. Gundy said it was unclear whether Robinson suffered a mild concussion. Colorado senior place-kicker Kevin Eberhart was named the Big 12 special-teams player of the week. Eberhart, from Broomfield, tied a school record Saturday night at Baylor with five field goals, including a career-long 54-yarder. ... Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy said he expects sophomore quarterback Zac Robinson to play Saturday at Nebraska. Robinson, a former Chatfield High School star, was hit hard in the fourth quarter of last weekend's 24-23 loss at Texas A&M and did not return. Gundy said it was unclear whether Robinson suffered a mild concussion.

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

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