



Rivalry now a two-way street

CU-NU game means a lot to both sides

By Ryan Thorburn

Thursday, November 22, 2007

The R-word.

When Tom Osborne and the Nebraska Cornhuskers were competing for national championships in the 1990s they refused to use or acknowledge it.

Colorado was just another team on the schedule, no matter what color of marker Bill McCartney or Gary Barnett used to circle the game.

A lot has changed in Lincoln since the Buffs' 62-36 victory in 2001. Frank Solich was fired after a 10-win season, Bill Callahan replaced him and abandoned the option, and Kansas and Missouri are now the Big 12 programs competing for a national championship.

The good news, at least for ABC, is that the Buffs (5-6) and Huskers (5-6) are both talking "rivalry" when looking ahead to Friday's CU-Nebraska game at Folsom Field (10 a.m., Channel 7).

Although it's still not easy to do in Lincoln.

"They do try to make it into a rivalry game. We accept that. We make it one back," Huskers quarterback Joe Ganz said during a press conference this week. "They don't like us. We really don't like them. It's just a known fact."

Callahan is very popular these days in Columbia, Mo., and Stillwater, Okla., and especially in Lawrence, Kan. Nebraska's lopsided losses this season include: 49-17 to USC, 41-6 to Missouri, 45-14 to Oklahoma State and 36-14 to Texas A&M.

And those are just the home debacles. The Huskers lost 76-39 at Kansas. In football.

If Osborne, now serving as Nebraska's interim athletic director, doesn't fire Callahan at the end of the season it might trump Appalachian State over Michigan and/or Stanford over USC as the upset of the year in college football.

"I'm not worried about next week or next month or next year, for that matter," Callahan said. "I'm just really focused on this game. We can sit here and speculate and talk all we want, but really the gist of it is, we've got to get ready to play a good Colorado team."

Callahan's players proved that they were not quitting on the season during a 73-31 victory over Kansas State on Nov. 10. If the Huskers can win in Boulder they will probably be selected for a bowl game

because their passionate fan base travels so well.

Osborne is expected to make an official decision on Callahan's future with the program on Saturday.

"You don't want it to be the 'Win one for the Gipper type deal,' but you really want to win it for him (Callahan) and all the coaches. And especially the fans," said Ganz, who threw for 510 yards and seven touchdowns against the Wildcats. "They've been through a tough year. We'd like to reward him with winning this last game and then going to a bowl game and hopefully winning that. There is kind of a sentimental value to that it, where we do want to win it for the coaches and players.

"We just want to finish the season with a win and a chance to go to a bowl game."

Ironically, Shawn Watson is Callahan's offensive coordinator. The same man who called the plays for the Buffs during their 62-36 win in the game six years ago that led to a Big 12 title for CU and Nebraska getting exposed as a fraud in the national title game.

"I think Coach Watson got Gatorade dumped over his head when we beat them last year," Ganz said. "It means a lot to those guys, just like it means a lot to us."

Sounds like ... a rivalry?

"I think it is pretty important to them, but it is pretty important here, too," Nebraska center Brett Byford said. "Probably more so the last few years, because in the Big 12 North we do not play like the Oklahomas and those teams every year. I think it has definitely grown a lot. I think it is getting bigger."



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CU-FSU date, venue likely to change for '08

By Kyle Ringo

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Colorado football fans planning to travel to Tallahassee, Fla., next September to watch the Buffs take on Florida State for the third time in five years will probably have to tweak their itinerary.

CU and Florida State are close to an agreement that would move the game to Jacksonville's Municipal Stadium or Tampa's Raymond James Stadium, CU athletic director Mike Bohn said.

The game is scheduled for Sept. 20 and will be the first in a brutal three-game stretch that also includes home games against West Virginia and Texas. Bohn said the game could be moved up a week to Sept. 13, which is slated as a bye week now. Details are still being discussed.

Florida State president T.K. Wetherell told the Tampa Tribune last month that he would like the game to be moved to Tampa, which is home to the fifth-largest population of FSU alumni.

The Seminoles haven't played in Tampa since 1979, but they have played in Jacksonville several times in that span, including a victory over Alabama earlier this season. FSU trounced Colorado 47-7 in 2003, the first time CU traveled to Doak Campbell Stadium in Tallahassee.

"We would clearly like to move the Colorado game to either Jacksonville or Tampa," Wetherell told the Tribune. "I have to believe that Colorado would much prefer to play anywhere than Doak Campbell Stadium."

Bohn said the idea was proposed by Florida State, but CU is willing to move the game because it offers coach Dan Hawkins and the Buffs some relief in the midst of that difficult stretch early in the season.

Who has heart?

For the 10th consecutive season, the fans behind the Colorado bench will award one CU player the Buffalo Heart Award at the end of Friday's game.

The award was conceived during the 1998 season by CU season-ticket holder Pat Grimes and several friends who enjoyed watching former wide receiver Darrin Chiaverini play. The award is given to the player who shows heart, grit, determination and desire throughout the season.

NCAA rules allow fans to give such awards as long as they don't cost more than \$75. Former linebacker Thaddeus Washington won the award last season.

CU sports information director Dave Plati said the school hopes to be able to post the name of the winner on the scoreboard at the end of the game. Fans in section 119 and others nearby vote on the award in the weeks leading up to the final home game every season, Grimes said.

The award has always been given to a senior, but Grimes said every Buff is eligible.

"I'm very happy the award has been embraced by the program, the players and the fans," Grimes said. "It gives all the fans a chance to show their appreciation not only to the player who wins but for all the CU players who have practiced so hard and put in so much time and effort for our ultimate enjoyment.

"The true joy is seeing the face of the player who usually has played his last game on Folsom Field when he receives the award and knows the fans have recognized his play."

Likely candidates for this season's award include: senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley, who has endured four wrist surgeries at CU; senior linebacker Jordon Dizon; senior offensive linemen Tyler Polumbus and Edwin Harrison; senior running backs Hugh Charles and Byron Ellis; senior wide receivers Dusty Sprague and Cody Crawford; and junior special teams captain R.J. Brown, who was forced to miss much of the season after suffering multiple concussions.

'Heart' winners

1998 — Darrin Chiaverini, wide receiver

1999 — Mike Moschetti, quarterback

2000 — Eric McCready, wide receiver

2001 — Cortlen Johnson, tailback

2002 — Tyler Brayton, Defensive tackle

2003 — Medford Moorer, free safety

2004 — Bobby Purify, tailback

2005 — Joel Klatt, quarterback

2006 — Thaddaeus Washington, linebacker



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Bowl hopes dangling in front of Buffs

*By Patrick Ridgell**Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — University of Colorado coach Dan Hawkins is reluctant to discuss what lies ahead beyond his team's next game. We're not.

If his Buffs can somehow manage Friday to beat Nebraska (10 a.m., ABC) they'll finish the regular season at 6-6 and put themselves in position to receive a bowl invitation, which would be officially unveiled on Dec. 2. Going bowling is a major incentive for the Buffs, who'll once again set the program record for single-season starts made by freshmen on Friday. The current mark is 45. Denying Nebraska of bowl eligibility as it did with a win in Lincoln in 2004 would feel nice for CU. But staying home for Christmas would hurt in many ways.

After CU lost to Missouri on Nov. 3 and was eliminated from the Big 12 North race, Hawkins talked to his team about bowl possibilities. But since about the middle of the season, when the Buffs neared that all-important sixth win, he has shied away from making public comments about what a bowl would mean to his program.

He's instead opted to say his team was just focusing on the "Tiger Bowl" or "The Cyclone Bowl." We know how those turned out.

This week, Hawkins acknowledged the obvious — that his youthful program could benefit from the extra practices postseason play brings.

"Any time we can get work, it's good because we're so young, so the extra practices would definitely be a positive," he said.

The perspective is a bit different, though, if seen from the other side. If you're one of the few Big 12 programs that don't get the extra bowl practices, which most coaches equate to an extra session of spring drills, you fall behind.

Some of CU's fifth-year seniors, who've lived both sides of the equation, said that's a big factor.

"It's a good bit," defensive end Alonzo Barrett said of the distance teams fall when they receive no bowl bid. "The young guys finally get to get into the defense, and they start taking those reps and getting ready for next year."

Said Terrence Wheatley: "Yeah, definitely, especially when you have the younger guys, you want to have those bowl practices to get them up to speed. Not so much in terms of understanding the defense, but just playing, period."

"I think for us not to have that, that is definitely not a good thing."

Even if CU is 6-6, a bowl isn't guaranteed. Kansas stayed home last season after going 6-6. But the Buffs, whose schedule is ranked the fifth most difficult by Sagarin computers, should like their chances.

The Big 12 has contracts with seven non-BCS bowls. The Big 12 champ goes to a BCS bowl, and with the success of Missouri and Kansas in 2007, the league hopes to land an at-large spot in another BCS bowl.

Also, the Gator Bowl's deals with the Big 12 and Big East forces it to take a Big 12 team in two of the next three seasons.

So that's at least eight guaranteed spots, with the chance of growing to nine with another BCS spot, or 10 through the Gator Bowl.

Entering this weekend, seven Big 12 programs are bowl-eligible. An eighth will be the CU-Nebraska winner. Kansas State will be the ninth if it wins Saturday at Fresno State.

The Texas Bowl in Houston will choose a Big 12 team if one is eligible when it gets to choose. It has the eighth, and final, choice of Big 12 programs.

"We're very intent on having a Big 12 team," Texas Bowl director David Brady said. "If the Big 12 gets to nine teams and (CU is) that ninth team, we'd be excited to have them in the game."

Brady said Houston would likely be its other choice, barring some upsets this weekend.

The Insight Bowl in Tempe, Ariz., chooses the sixth team in the Big 12, and the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La., selects seventh. Directors of both said they'll be watching Friday's events unfold in Boulder with great interest.

So will the Buffs, for whom the prospect of another holiday season spent at home is not appealing.

"I think it gave us a little bit of a chip on our shoulder going into the spring, everybody was really excited about it," quarterback Cody Hawkins said about missing a bowl in 2006. "Every team wants to go to a bowl game, and it was a painful Christmas break last year. We didn't like having that long of a break, so hopefully it'll be a lot shorter this year."

EXTRA POINTS: CU reported 1,500 tickets remained as of Wednesday afternoon. ... While the Sagarin computer rankings put CU's schedule as the fifth most difficult, the NCAA has the Buffs' schedule at 22nd. The NCAA rankings are based solely on won-loss records. ... The Buffs practiced in the bubble Wednesday. Dan Hawkins said Tuesday they would work outside on Wednesday, snow or shine.

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