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cu notes

Buffs will try to turn around turnover rate

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Saying his offense is "not far away" from hitting its stride, Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins pointed to an improvement in turnover margin as a focus for the remainder of the season.

With 21 giveaways against just 12 takeaways, Colorado is tied with fellow Big 12 Conference members Baylor and Nebraska for 106th place among 119 major-college football programs in turnover margin (minus-1.12 per game).

"Where we are not good is in interceptions lost (14) and interceptions gained (six)," Hawkins said Tuesday during his weekly media luncheon.

"We just have to continue to work on that. Through a process of getting better and getting a little bit of experience and guys having a little bit more savvy, you try to snap that."

Cody Hawkins' 14 interceptions lead the Big 12.

"I definitely have to pick things up and start playing (better)," Cody said Tuesday.

Colorado Football

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The Colorado defense could do its part by recovering more fumbles and intercepting more passes. CU's six picks is tied for last among Big 12 defenses.

Getting some interceptions could be crucial Saturday against pass-happy Texas Tech (6-2, 2-2 Big 12). Red Raiders quarterback Graham Harrell leads the nation in total offense (434.8 yards per game) and touchdown passes (32).

"If they're throwing 60-plus times, we've got to get at least two, maybe three interceptions," CU safety Ryan Walters said. "That's going to be the emphasis in practice this week - getting our hands on the ball."

How does a defensive player practice interceptions?

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"A lot of it is getting tips from film study and seeing where (Harrell) is probably going to go with the ball in different situations," Walters said.

Old trick. When asked about the fake-fumble trick play that went for a touchdown pass to Tyson DeVree against Kansas, Dan Hawkins said he first used that play against Hawaii when he coached at Boise State.

Hawkins noticed that Hawaii's safeties set up close to the line of scrimmage for plays deep in their territory. When Hawkins saw KU's safeties do the same thing, "I'm kind of going, 'OK, reload it. It's ready.'"

"If you hit it, you look good. If you don't, you look like an idiot."

Footnotes. CU sophomore fullback Jake Behrens, who has drawn extensive playing time the past two weeks, injured an ankle Sunday during conditioning drills and is listed as questionable for Saturday. ... Dan Hawkins' prediction for the World Series: A four-game sweep by the Rockies. "How could you not (pick that)? They've been sweeping the last month." ... Kickoff for the Nov. 3 home game against Missouri has been set for 4:30 p.m. to accommodate a national telecast by FSN.

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college football

Goin' bowling? Hawkins not looking ahead

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Colorado Football

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BOULDER — Although the regular season is two-thirds complete, Colorado coach Dan Hawkins is not about to discuss bowl-game possibilities with his football team. Or with anybody else, for that matter.

Hawkins doesn't want his players to look even one day past Saturday's game at Texas Tech.

"Right now we are playing in the 'Red Raider Bowl' in Lubbock," Hawkins said earlier today during his weekly media luncheon. "And we're excited about it. I'm not concerned with all that (bowl talk)."

Colorado (4-4, 2-2 Big 12) needs two victories in its final four games to become bowl eligible. However, a record of 6-6 would not guarantee a bowl bid if the Big 12 ends up with nine or more bowl-eligible teams, which could happen. The Big 12 has tie-ins with eight bowl games. After those spots are filled, other Big 12 teams would compete with bowl-eligible teams around the country to fill open bowl slots.

Following Saturday's game against Texas Tech (6-2, 2-2), the Buffaloes play at home against Missouri (6-1, 2-1), on the road against Iowa State (1-7, 0-4) and at home against Nebraska (4-4, 1-3).

"You never know what can happen," senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley said. "You just have to take it game by game, day by day."

"You just need to think, 'If we win every game from here on out, then we don't have to worry about it — we'll be in a bowl.' But if you're thinking that we need to win two more games, you put stress on yourself."

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Tuesday's local college football notes

By B.G. Brooks (CU), Randy Holtz (CSU), Jim Benton (Air Force) and wire services (Northern Colorado, Wyoming)
October 24, 2007

CU

House calls optional?

Somebody call a doctor

But be selective. Please.

"I've coached some guys over the years who were going to be doctors and I thought, 'No way that guy's operating on me,' " Colorado coach **Dan Hawkins** said.

Senior tailback **Byron Ellis**, a pre-med major, doesn't belong anywhere near that category. Hawkins describes Ellis as "so doggone steady and dependable.

"Every time we want to have somebody do something a little different or difficult, you go, 'Oh, Byron can do that.' He's one of those guys, when he graduates, you look at his numbers and (shrug). But we'll miss Byron. A lot."

True, Ellis' 2007 statistics don't qualify as eye-popping: 21 carries, 72 yards; eight receptions, 27 yards, one touchdown.

But the 6-foot, 215-pounder from Culver City, Calif., is CU's best blocking tailback, adjusting to protection schemes and rules that "sometimes change week to week," Hawkins said. "You have to not only physically be able to do it, but mentally see it, then do it. And (Ellis) is awesome at that."

Staying in touch

Hawkins said "a lot of calls" are being made to families of the two dozen or so Buffaloes players from Southern California, where wildfires have raged for several days.

"It's a tragic event down there," he said, noting none of the CU players' families has been injured. "We're just hoping everybody comes out of it OK, but it's a state of flux."

Redshirt freshman tailback **Demetrius Sumler**, of San Diego, said his family has not been threatened, "but (the fires) have been pretty close to where my high school (Cathedral Catholic) was."

Sumler and his family are familiar with the wildfire peril. "It's real bad. We went through it during my sophomore year," he said. "We didn't have school for a week and didn't play for a week. . . . I think this one is a little worse, though."

Flush the bowl talk

The Buffs (4-4 overall, 2-2 Big 12 Conference) are two wins from being bowl eligible, but Hawkins said keeping count can be counterproductive, even though one of his stated preseason goals was to at least reach postseason play.

"We're playing (Saturday) in the Red Raiders Bowl in Lubbock, and we're excited about it," Hawkins said. "There's a lot of football left, (and) we have to focus on the task at hand. . . . We better win this week, next week and the week(s) after that."

Etc.

- Hawkins' World Series prediction: The Rockies will sweep. "Hey, they've swept everything so far, haven't they?" he asked.

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Thirsty for Texas T

By ELIOT DEMPSEY Colorado Daily Sports Writer
Tuesday, October 23, 2007 9:45 PM MDT

Coming off of the Buffaloes second loss in as many weeks, the mood at Dan Hawkins' weekly press conference was surprisingly upbeat.

Perhaps it was the excitement in the air over the Rockies upcoming World Series appearance, or perhaps it's the fact that last year the Buffs won their first game of the season against these same Red Raiders that they will face in Lubbock, Texas on Saturday.

When asked after the press conference for his prediction for the Rockies, Hawkins raised his arms high and declared with a smile "Sweep!"

As for Texas Tech, he did not give a prediction and said that there have been some changes in this year's Red Raiders, including a new defensive coordinator, Ruffin McNeill.

"They are a little bit different defensively, not a bunch different, but some different from last year," said Hawkins. "Offensively, again, I think you need to be able to keep them off balance. Obviously you can't line up and do the same things you did last year because they're obviously going to watch that as well. Then there is the turnover factor, hopefully you're able to get some turnovers again."

In the Buffs 30-6 win last season, they forced five turnovers with three interceptions and two fumbles. Turnovers have not come as easily as the Buffs would have liked this year, and it is an area that Hawkins said he wants the team to focus on.

"The area where we have not been real good at when you look statistically where we are at is kind of in terms of fumbles lost and fumbles gained. We're kind of about there with everybody else. Where we are not good is in interceptions lost and interceptions gained," he said. "We're probably twice as much on the interceptions and twice as low on the interceptions gained. You just have to continue to work on that and through a process of getting better and a little bit of experience and guys having a little bit more savvy, you try to snap that."

Texas Tech, coming off of a 41-10 loss to Missouri last week, is known for their high-powered offense, and this year they have a serious weapon in redshirt freshman Michael Crabtree who leads the nation in receptions, receiving yards, receiving touchdowns and scoring. Throwing to Crabtree is junior quarterback Graham Harrell.

One question facing the Buffs after losing two in a row is how the team is holding up mentally. Hawkins was asked about team morale, and he answered with a smile on his face, giving the impression that all is well in the locker room.

"We've got a good football team, we do. But we're also playing a great schedule. So we just have to be a little bit more efficient and create a couple more things here or there. I've said this before: No one wants to be close, but I don't think you have to sit around and mope when you're in the thick of it. You just have to grab a couple more opportunities. We're playing great football teams and there are still a few of them left on the schedule so we've got to get going," he said.

Never looking too far ahead, Hawkins, and Cody Hawkins, both said that the possibility of going to a bowl game is not something that is being talked about. Both men made it a point to say that the only game they are thinking off is Texas Tech and the "Red Raider Bowl" on Saturday.

"I think it will be great. Anytime you go down into that part of the country you've got people that are very avid football fans. Obviously one of the couple of games we won last year was against them so they will obviously have their horns out because of that. Having lost last week they will have a lot of firepower, they will have a lot of reasons to get fired up," said Hawkins.



Bufs still eye Big 12 berth

CU would again need plenty of help to reach championship game

By Kyle Ringo
Wednesday, October 24, 2007

The Colorado football team isn't going to the Big 12 Conference championship game in five weeks without a lot of help.

Sound familiar?

It should.

The Buffs — veterans in the program anyway — have been in this position before, trailing in the standings with November on the horizon. An almost unbelievable set of circumstances unfolded at the tail end of the 2004 and 2005 seasons allowing the Buffs to compete for the conference crown.

Both years involved plenty of mediocrity within the north division and the Buffs learning while sitting on their couches watching others lose that they would play in the title game. Both scenarios also involved Iowa State place-kicker Bret Culbertson missing key field goals to help the Buffs.

Culbertson is still around in case you're wondering. And he's made just eight of 15 field goal attempts this season.

CU is back in familiar territory after suffering consecutive losses in the past two weeks to north division rivals Kansas and Kansas State. Kansas holds what amounts to a three-game lead on the Buffs with a 3-0 conference record and the tiebreaker on their side.

Missouri and Kansas State also would have to suffer multiple setbacks for the Buffs to reach their goal. CU plays at Texas Tech on Saturday (10 a.m. ABC), a place it has never won, and will host Missouri the following week.

"It hurts your manhood, I guess you could say, hoping for somebody else to lose so you can get back up there," senior linebacker Jordon Dizon said. "But we still control our destiny somewhat. No matter if they win or lose, we still have to go out and win."

Dizon and others in the program said winning the conference championship remains the primary goal of the team, despite its position in the standings. If there is a team in the league that would believe in its chances with a .500 record at this point, it is the Buffs.

While they are willing to acknowledge their desire to win the north division, they aren't biting on bowl game talk just yet. Ask them about their bowl chances and you might hear crickets chirping.

At 4-4 overall and 2-2 in Big 12 play, CU must win three of its final four games to assure itself of a bowl game.

The Buffs know from Kansas' experience last year that winning six games — the minimum standard for bowl eligibility — would guarantee them nothing. The Jayhawks finished 6-6 last season and were home for the holidays.

"Right now we are playing in the Red Raider Bowl in Lubbock, and we're excited about it," coach Dan Hawkins said Tuesday, steadfastly refusing to delve into talk about the postseason.

Every Division I team begins the season with a bowl game listed among its top goals, and the Bufs are no different, even if they refuse to talk about it. A bowl appearance, no matter which one, would help the program in recruiting and it would also provide 15 additional practice sessions in December.

Those practices are coveted by every coach, but especially those building programs around a young core of players.

"I don't think anyone has made any plans to go home for Christmas, we're all about football right now and we're trying to win football games right now," freshman quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "We have to beat Texas Tech, then Missouri, we have got to beat Iowa State and we have to beat Nebraska. We're just trying to win football games and whatever happens, happens."

Senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley said the players with the most at stake — the senior class — are probably the most comfortable with the current situation. He said he knows from experience that younger players are more vulnerable to being overwhelmed by the big picture instead of taking it one game at a time.

"I've been around long enough that stranger things have happened to me," Wheatley said. "I think it was my sophomore year we went to the Big 12 Championship and everybody kind of wrote us off and things just fell in place that last week.

"You just never know, you have to take it game-by-game, day-by-day and just focus on what you need to do."



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Buff players affected by wildfires

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, October 24, 2007

Coaches, no matter the sport, are constantly trying to minimize distractions for the athletes with whom they work. It's nearly an impossible task for Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins and dozens of his colleagues this week.

The Colorado roster features about a dozen players from areas in Southern California being affected by raging fires pushed by gale-force winds. Several players practiced Tuesday in preparation for this week's game at Texas Tech knowing their families and friends back home had been evacuated from the homes in which they grew up.

As of late Tuesday night, reports estimated nearly one million people had been evacuated with 500,000 acres burned. It is the largest evacuation in California state history.

Redshirt freshman defensive end Marquez Herrod said his foster parents, James and Mindi Arnold, were forced to leave their home in Escondido, Calif. for safe haven in downtown San Diego. He said his parents left the house with sprinklers running on the roof.

"It looked like our house was in the clear and then the winds shifted and started coming from the west," Herrod said. "There is a big park across the street from my house and if it gets into there, we've got problems because there is dried brush and all kinds of trees."

Herrod said he is doing his best to stay focused on his schoolwork and this week's game preparation, but it has been difficult on him. He said he has been talking to his parents whenever he gets a chance.

"My time is already divided up, and this is just like one more thing," Herrod said.

Wide receiver Cody Crawford said his family also has been evacuated from his home outside San Diego and his roommate left CU on Monday to go home and help his family evacuate.

Crawford said another friend's home was one of more than 1,600 that had been reported destroyed by Tuesday evening.

"As long as everyone is out of there, a house is a house, but your family is your family," Crawford said. "So it's good that everyone is safe."

Wide receiver Scotty McKnight spent the first 18 years of his life living in the same house in Coto de Casa, Calif., and he and his family have had to evacuate five or six times in the past because of wildfires.

He said his father, a high school football coach at Mater Dei High School, described scenes to him Monday and Tuesday in phone conversations.

"He said with all the fuel it's like a volcano," McKnight said. "Things just ignite."

Hawkins said during his Tuesday media luncheon that it was impossible to know how his players' lives might be affected because "the thing is still raging." Hawkins called the fires tragic.

Also, Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn, the former A.D. at San Diego State, said Tuesday evening that several of the houses on the street where he lived had burned.

Pass-protection doctor

Hawkins was asked Tuesday about senior tailback Byron Ellis who is primarily used in passing situations because he is so adept at picking up blitzes as a blocker. Ellis is studying to be a doctor at CU and is one of the most intelligent players on the team.

Coaches are so impressed with him and his ability to quickly pick things up, they don't hesitate to heap more responsibility on him each week.

"I've coached some guys over the years that were going to be doctors, and you're thinking, 'There is no way that guy is operating on me.' I'm telling you," Hawkins said. "I was actually thinking about Byron the other day and I was thinking, 'You know, if I'm in a car wreck and I'm on my last day and he's the doctor, I'd go, 'All right, I've got a chance.' "

Going all the way

CU kickoff return man Terrence Wheatley has helped the Buffs improve from 95th in the country, averaging 18.2 yards per return last season, to 41st nationally, averaging 23 yards per return this fall.

Wheatley's personal average of 25 yards per return also ranks 41st in the nation. He has just missed returning several kicks for touchdowns this season and talked about his desire to get the job done at least once before the season ends.

The Buffs haven't returned a kickoff for a touchdown since Oct. 18, 2003, at Kansas State. Jeremy Bloom returned the kickoff for 88 yards that day.

"I've definitely had some frustrating moments, it always seems like I'm one guy away and I've been saying that for two or three weeks," Wheatley said.

Trick a treat

Hawkins revealed Tuesday how a trick play used to score a touchdown against Kansas was actually conceived years ago.

Cody Hawkins connected with tight end Tyson Devree in the third quarter last week after first pretending to have fumbled the snap. The fake drew the defense forward, allowing Devree to run into the open behind the defense.

Hawkins said he first got the idea for the play when he coached at Willamette University in the mid-1990s when he got a tip one day about an upcoming opponent's tendency to stack the line of scrimmage and play aggressively in short-yardage situations. He said he saw the same tendency in Kansas.

"You know, you hit it, you look good. You don't, you look like an idiot," he said.

He tried the play once while at Boise and everything worked well except the quarterback overthrew the wide open receiver. Hawkins was asked whether the increased scrutiny coaches are under tempers his creative juices?

"You know me. I don't worry about that," he said.

McCarty memorial

A memorial service for former CU tight end Tennyson McCarty will be held at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 4 on the CU campus at the Macky Auditorium.

Some of McCarty's friends have created a Web site honoring McCarty, who played at CU from 1994 to 1997 and remained close to the program through his ministry work. Visit the site at www.tennysonmccarty.com

McCarty was found dead near a car just off Peak to Peak Highway on Friday. He had been missing for several days. The cause of his death is still being determined, but police have ruled out foul play.

Notable

Dan Hawkins was asked for his prediction for the World Series on Tuesday. He sat in his chair and held his arms aloft in triumph. He later predicted a Rockies "sweep." ... Jake Behrens (ankle) is questionable.



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