



Early high Tide too much for CU

Down 27-0, Buffs see rally fall just short in Independence

Monday, December 31, 2007

SHREVEPORT, La. -- If it's true that a bowl performance can set the tone for the coming year for a college football team, it seems the Colorado Buffaloes could be heading for a brighter day in 2008.

Sure the Buffs lost 30-24 to Alabama on Sunday night in the 32nd annual Independence Bowl. But they went down fighting, kicking, scratching and clawing. In fact, they went down lateraling on the final play from scrimmage, hoping to pull off a miracle score to win the game.

After Cody Hawkins completed the final pass of the year to wide receiver Scotty McKnight, the laterals began. McKnight tossed the ball to center Daniel Sanders, who tossed it to wide receiver Josh Smith, whose forward pass to fellow receiver Dusty Sprague ended the game.

The Buffs fell short after battling back from a horrible start in which they spotted the Crimson Tide 27 points. At that point, few believed CU would have a chance to win the first CU game played in Louisiana in 27 years.

It was enough to leave a sour taste in the mouths of returning players who might be able to draw on the mistakes in the game as motivation for the offseason. And it was enough for seniors who were able to walk off the field one last time with their heads held high knowing they had left it all on the field.

"I wouldn't have expected anything less than the heart they showed at the end of the game," said Sprague, a fifth-year senior.

After setting a CU record by never missing a game and playing in the 51st contest of his career, senior linebacker Jordon Dizon said the final outcome was both inspiring and heartbreaking for him. He made 10 tackles in the game and said he is sad to put black and gold behind him, but he believes "the Buffs' stock is on the rise."

"I'm proud of our guys for the way they came back," coach Dan Hawkins said after his first bowl game at CU. "It looked like the rout was on and it would have been easy to fold out tents but we didn't."

Colorado finished with a 6-7 record, marking the first time since 1984 the Buffs have produced back-to-back losing seasons. The loss gives the program a 12-16 overall record in bowl games and was the fourth defeat in the past five bowl trips for the Buffs.

Alabama added to its national record with its 55th appearance and its 30th bowl win.

"We had great focus tonight," Alabama quarterback John Parker Wilson said after completing 19 of 32

passes for 256 yards and three touchdowns. "It was really a team win. We had some ups and downs but we kept our composure and finished the game."

Wilson was named the offensive most valuable player after leading his team to its first win in more than two months in front of a crowd numbering 47,043.

In the build up to the game, Hawkins raved about Alabama's team speed and it proved to be too much for the Buffs. This Crimson Tide is more like Crimson Rapids.

"I got caught from behind a few times and I was like, 'Wow,'" CU running back Hugh Charles said.

Charles was effective at times in the game and completed his career with 14 carries for 69 yards.

Colorado started poorly falling behind 20-0 in the first quarter. Quarterback Cody Hawkins threw an interception on his first pass attempt, leading to an Alabama field goal. The interception ended a streak of 70 consecutive passes without an interception for Hawkins.

It also broke a streak of 10 quarters without a turnover in bowl games for the Buffs. The last CU turnover in a bowl before the interception came in the second quarter of the 2002 Alamo Bowl.

The Buffs gave the ball to Alabama at midfield after a failed fake punt and the Crimson Tide drove for its first touchdown. Wilson threw touchdown passes of 15 and 34 yards to receivers Keith Brown and Matt Caddell. It was the most points Alabama had scored in one quarter of a bowl game since 1953.

Colorado regained its composure midway through the second quarter after giving up 27 consecutive points, the biggest run ever surrendered by the Buffs in a bowl. The Buffs scored when Hawkins connected with tight end Tyson Devree on a 4-yard touchdown pass with 3 minutes, 43 seconds remaining in the first half.

The Buffs used timeouts defensively and got the ball back in time to drive for a second score when Hawkins found Sprague along the sideline. Sprague slipped a tackle and dived to the pylon for six points.

Hawkins put the loss on his shoulders because of his two interceptions. But he also threw three touchdown passes in the game, including a second connection with Devree in the second half. Hawkins finished the game with 24 completions in 39 attempts for 322 yards.

"If we didn't shoot ourselves in the foot 500 times in the first half, we win that game," Hawkins said.



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Hypolite has big plans for 2008

Monday, December 31, 2007

SHREVEPORT, La. -- Colorado defensive tackle George Hypolite has big plans for his senior season in 2008.

He's not making any promises about the results the Buffs will produce against another challenging schedule, but Hypolite said the program has developed an attitude where everyone is beginning to expect success.

He was asked how the Buffs' loss Sunday night to Alabama in the Independence Bowl will propel the team into winter conditioning and spring football, and, ultimately, next season.

"We're going to grind," he said. "I can guarantee you right now the product we put on the field next season will be ready to win the Big 12 championship."

"I'm not saying that we're going to win one and I'm not saying that we're not. I'm saying that we'll be ready. We'll be prepared. We will have worked ourselves into a position where we are ready to compete for a Big 12 championship."

Hypolite expects to be back for his senior season even though he is exploring his options in the NFL draft. He is expected to be a team leader and a possible captain in 2008. And the defensive line he anchors with fellow tackle Brandon Nicolas could be the strength of the defense.

"I think next year, we're going to be able to build upon what we did this year," he said. "We had a lot of young guys playing this year and so we'll kind of be a veteran team. We're going to hit the offseason and attack."

State pride

Colorado wore stickers of the state flag on its helmets Sunday for the first time. Coach Dan Hawkins directed the equipment staff to add the stickers to the helmets and it could become a permanent feature in the future.

Freshman record

Wide receiver Kendrick Celestine was one of five freshmen to start the game on offense for the Buffs setting a school record for a bowl game.

Celestine is the only player on the CU roster from Louisiana and was playing in front nearly 60 friends and family members from whom he had been able to secure tickets. CU's other freshmen starters Sunday were Cody Hawkins, Josh Smith, Kai Maiava and Ryan Miller.

Interception streak

lives on

When CU safety Ryan Walters intercepted a pass in the second quarter, it extended CU's streak of at least one interception in 14 consecutive bowl games.

The streak began in the 1991 Orange Bowl when CU defeated Notre Dame to win the national title. Former free safety Greg Thomas had two interceptions in that game.

Notable

Umpire Mike Rhoades was taken to a local hospital after injuring a rotator cuff in the first half. It was the final game of his career. The long-time Western Athletic Conference official is retiring. ... Colorado rushed for 347 yards in a bowl victory over Boston College in 1999. It had run for 346 combined yards in the four bowl games prior to Sunday. CU gained only 75 yards rushing against Alabama.



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QB Hawkins bemoans two interceptions

Buff frosh says turnovers were difference in loss

By Kyle Ringo

Monday, December 31, 2007

SHREVEPORT, La.-- Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins has plenty to feel good about after completing his first season as the starter in Boulder. It was one of the best seasons in CU passing history.

Yet Hawkins probably won't allow himself to feel that pride for awhile after his redshirt freshman year ended Sunday night in Independence Stadium with him wishing he had just a few more seconds to throw one or two more passes.

He was in a groove and feeling momentum just as time was running out.

Hawkins led Colorado to a valiant comeback that fell short against Alabama in the 32nd annual Independence Bowl. He threw for 322 yards in the game, with 220 of them coming after halftime when the Buffs finally found the right gear required for postseason play.

"When the momentum gets going, everybody on the sidelines starts feeling that mojo a little bit," Hawkins said.

In the end, Hawkins walked off the field feeling like the two interceptions he threw cost his team the game. He placed the blame for the loss on his shoulders the way a leader would.

The first of those interceptions came on his first pass of the game. He tried to thread a needle down the middle of the field to the hands of tight end Riar Geer, but the ball was snatched away by Alabama's Rolando McClain.

Later in the second half, one of Hawkins' passes was batted at the line of scrimmage and Darren Mustin made a diving interception just before it hit the ground.

"We're going to stand here the whole offseason saying, 'Woulda, coulda, shoulda.' But the bottom line is if I don't throw two interceptions... It's a totally different ball game," Hawkins said. "Other than the first 20 minutes, we really kind of took it to them."

Hawkins said he was most disappointed seeing the faces of his senior teammates as they took off their uniforms and shoulder pads in the locker room one final time. He said he wanted to send them off on a better note and he knows he will be in their shoes one day

Hawkins said his performance will motivate him in the offseason to improve in every area as a quarterback. He believes the Buffs have an opportunity for a special season next year if he can make a

leap to another level as a signal caller.

"I'm pretty upset right now so I think it's kind of good for me to go into the offseason with a chip on my shoulder," he said. "I know I'm going to have to go in and win that starting job again."



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Woelk: Lessons to be learned from bowl game loss

Oh, so close.

One more play -- somewhere, someplace, at some juncture in the game -- and the Colorado Buffaloes could very well have pulled off a comeback of epic proportions Sunday night.

This is one the Buffs will be kicking themselves over for an entire offseason. Despite a long list of mistakes, the Buffs had an opportunity to beat Alabama in the Independence Bowl.

But in the end, it was too little, too late -- and, to be honest, still a little too young.

By the time the Buffs wiped the bowl-game glaze from their eyes at Independence Stadium, Alabama had built a 27-0 lead. This one was over midway through the second quarter.

And then it wasn't.

By the time the game clock had ticked down to zero, the young Buffs had thrown a serious scare into the Tide. They made Alabama work for the win. They made Nick Saban sweat for every bit of that \$4 million salary.

And most of all, they served notice that Colorado should be a program with which to be reckoned in the future.

Lessons for the Buffs to take away from the game?

The worst wounds are those that are self-inflicted. When the other team is slightly bigger, faster and stronger, you have to be almost perfect to stay in the game. The Buffs were anything but. An interception on CU's first possession, a failed fake punt, a partially blocked punt and too many penalties dug the early hole.

Then, even when the Buffs rallied, the mistakes continued: a missed field goal, more penalties and another interception. The Buffs gave themselves the chance to produce a rally for the ages -- but in the end, they walked away only remembering what might have been.

There's no issue with heart in Hawk's program. A comeback win over Nebraska in their final regular season game and a near-comeback against Alabama in the bowl game shows the Buffs have paid attention to Hawk's mantra of resolve. They believe in their head coach.

But most of all, the Buffs learned a very harsh lesson. Resolve, guts, heart -- all those intangibles -- are nice. Not putting yourself in a 27-point hole to begin with is a much better way to play the game.

Perhaps more than anything, Sunday night's game provided a capsulized glimpse of where Dan Hawkins' program stands today.

The foundation is there. Progress is being made. The offense is beginning to manifest itself into what Hawkins and his staff envisions; the defense is doing the same.

But there are still holes to fill. Lots of them.

The Buffs don't yet have a consistent running game -- at least not one that can line up and smash an opponent when necessary. As a result, Colorado is still far too dependent on misdirection plays, a scheme that is only marginally successful when the opponent has no reason to fear your inside running game.

The hope is that an experienced offensive line -- and an infusion of talent -- will improve that area.

Meanwhile, the defense still suffers from moments of what can only be described as brainlock. Sunday night, Alabama had far too many big gains that looked far too easy in the first half. CU shored up the problem in the second half, but the damage had already been done.

How to address that issue will no doubt be a primary concern in the offseason.

Still, objective folks have to like the overall progress. Of the 22 starters in Sunday night's game, seven will return on offense and eight on defense. That doesn't include linebacker Mike Sipili, who sat out last semester, and it doesn't take into account a number of youngsters who received plenty of valuable playing time this season.

But most of all, you have to like the reaction of the players and the coaches after Sunday's loss. Yes, they were proud of their resolve. Yes, they take heart in the fact that they didn't quit when they were down 27-0.

Most importantly, however, they know there is plenty of work to be done. They know that while the foundation may be in place, this program is a long way from a finished product.

That realization will pay dividends, beginning in about two weeks. That's when offseason conditioning begins. It's when a hunger for next season will begin to grow.

It's when the lessons learned not only from Sunday night, but the entire season, should be the driving force for 2008.



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independence bowl - alabama 30, cu 24

Bufs' last gasp fails to reverse the Tide

Crimson Tide builds 27-0 lead before Colorado comes back

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Buffaloes wide receiver Dusty Sprague dives into the end zone for a touchdown after getting by Alabama defensive back Kareem Jackson just before halftime to cut Colorado's deficit to 27-14. Sprague finished with two receptions for 30 yards. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

SHREVEPORT, La. — Colorado's first bowl game of the Dan Hawkins era didn't exactly go as the coach would have scripted Sunday night.

Looking overmatched early, the Buffaloes fell behind Alabama by 27 points in the first half of the Independence Bowl. Colorado made a game of it, but wasted opportunities in the second half and lost a 30-24 heartbreaker to the Southeastern Conference team before 47,043 at Independence Stadium.

Needing some time to adjust to Alabama's speed and strength, CU trailed 27-0 just 2 1/2 minutes into the second quarter but outscored the Crimson Tide 24-3 the rest of the way.

"I'm proud of the way the guys came back," said Hawkins, whose team could only follow the second part of his "start fast,

Colorado Football

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finish strong" mantra.

"It looked like the rout was on. Our guys could

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have pulled up the tent. They didn't do that."

After two touchdown passes by Cody Hawkins late in the second quarter, Colorado moved into Alabama territory three times in the third quarter but produced just three points. Cody Hawkins finished 24-for-39 passing for 322 yards and three scores. He threw two interceptions, one of which came on CU's first offensive play from scrimmage.

In the end, it was a case of too little, too late.

"Coming out of the gates, we weren't controlling the tempo," Cody Hawkins said. "Starting the game with a turnover, that puts you in the tank, and momentum is so important in college football. When you finally get some mojo going, you can get some things done."

Despite showing marked improvement over last season's 2-10 record, Colorado (6-7) couldn't avoid posting consecutive losing records for the first time since a six-year run of futility from 1979-84. The Buffs got the ball at the CU 20 with 1.5 seconds left in the game and, trying to pull off a miracle, threw a forward pass and three laterals before the Crimson Tide made the tackle to end the game.

"Just a few plays kept us from winning," Cody Hawkins said. "We're a young team. We'll learn from that."

With 20 points in the first quarter, Alabama (7-

6) tied its bowl best for scoring in a period. That's saying something, considering this is a program making its 55th bowl appearance, an



Alabama's Nikita Stover flips into the end zone to cap a 31-yard touchdown pass play from John Parker Wilson that gave the Crimson Tide a 27-0 lead. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

NCAA record. The Crimson Tide got 19-for-32 passing for 256 yards and three touchdowns from junior quarterback John Parker Wilson.

"We got off to a great start, which means we were well-prepared," said Alabama coach Nick Saban, who narrowly avoided a losing record in his first season in Tuscaloosa. "Colorado has a good team, and they did a good job of coming back."

Colorado had never allowed more than 14 points

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in a quarter during its 27 previous bowl games.

"I don't think we came out slow; Alabama came out fast," CU junior defensive tackle George Hypolite said.

Down 27-0, Colorado finally gave its fans something to cheer about when Cody Hawkins threw two touchdown passes during the final 2:05 of the second quarter. The first, a 4-yard toss to senior tight end Tyson DeVree, was set up by an interception from safety Ryan Walters, who returned the pick 35 yards to the Alabama 43-yard line.

"That turned the game around and got us back in it," Walters said.

After an Alabama punt, the Buffs took over at their 45 with 1:11 to go. Hawkins worked the clock to perfection with sideline passes. Then, on third-and-9, he hit senior Dusty Sprague on the 1-yard line, just in front of Alabama cornerback Kareem Jackson. Sprague dived for the end zone and scored just 4.4 seconds before halftime.

In the end, however, Alabama's early lead was enough. The Crimson Tide snapped a four-game losing streak.

"With what happened to us (losing four straight at the end of the regular season), this really showed a lot of maturity on our part to finish the way we did," Wilson said.

Considering the second half, Colorado could say the same thing.

The Grades | By Tom Kensler

OFFENSE

B Cody Hawkins and the offense could have but didn't quit after falling behind 27-0.

DEFENSE

C We'll give a "D" grade for the first half and a "B" for the second half.

SPECIAL TEAMS

D Nothing special on the Colorado side on this night.

OVERALL

C It takes a "B" effort or better to beat a Southeastern Conference team on most nights, including this one.

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woody paige

CU ends on jazzy note

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

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SHREVEPORT, La. — An unfunny thing happened to Alabama on the way to a 90-0 victory over Colorado.

A football game broke out Sunday night.

And on the last play, the Buffaloes were about a dozen laterals and about four-dozen yards from winning the Independence Bowl.

I saw CU's Miracle in Michigan, and I thought I was watching CU's Sensation in Shreveport.

To be? Not to be.

The Tide won, but did not roll. The Buffs lost, but did not fold.

Afterward, the predominantly Crimson crowd sang how 'Bama "beat the (another word for netherworld) out of you, CU."

But a six-point difference wasn't a real bad whupping.

Particularly when it's considered that Alabama was up 27-0 early in the second quarter.

CU "beat the h-e-double-hockey-sticks out of you, UA" in the final 31 minutes and 55 seconds, 24-3.

Lagniappe is a Louisiana word meaning "a little something extra," like a second helping of crayfish.

The Independence Bowl turned out to be a lagniappe in the fourth quarter when CU made the score 24-30.

Alabama was just trying to hang out and run out the last 3:51. The Tide did, thanks to one of those Southern quarterbacks with three names — John Parker Wilson. On third-and-7, when Wilson couldn't find anybody free, he took off running for the first down. Colorado did get the ball back with 1.5 seconds left, but there's not much you can do at that point except hook-and-lateral, lateral-and-run, hope-and-pray, tackle-and-fall, game over.

It's been somewhat of a hard, cold December in the state of Colorado. It was looking like it would be a hard, cold winter in Boulder in the training room.

Yes, the Buffs ended up 6-7, but they ended uplifted.

Coach Dan Hawkins reiterated after the game he "came to Colorado to be part of a national

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championship program and that's certainly the aspiration."

Eddie Crowder and Bill McCartney had similar records after their first two seasons, and they were soon in the top 20.

The Buffs won't be vying for No. 1 in the land next season, but they're not drowning anymore. They started five freshmen (a school high for a bowl) and 14 underclassmen overall. Several special players return. Offensive tackle Ryan Miller and defensive tackle George Hypolite. "Buffalo Bill" Cody Hawkins, who is related, came of age this season and had 322 yards passing and three touchdowns against Alabama. He needs three more quality receivers and a couple of conference-class running backs.

Colorado deserves some credit, even if Alabama coach Nick Saban wasn't willing to give the opposition much. "Colorado has a good team and did a good job of coming back." Then he added: "We made some mistakes in the game and let them come back." Enough about the Buffs and their rally, which was actual, not hypothetical.

But John Parker was the offensive MVP and is a classy young man/player. He threw for 256 yards and three scores — and has a strong grip on a handshake, the ball and his life. He said the victory was "humbling."

The Buffs had about 3,000 people here, the Tide about 40,000. The rest were for LSU and the giant corndogs served on the fairgrounds just outside the stadium.

When Ralphie, the CU mascot who reportedly will retire before next season, raced onto the field before the game, the people in red acted like they had never seen a buffalo.

They probably hadn't. Not many buffaloes down on the bayou.

The Buffaloes were fried like catfish in the opening quarter — 20 points, and it should have been more. Then it was more, 27 points, and the guy (from Shreveport, not Alabama as I reported, but all Southerners sound alike) who had asked Hawkins if this game was David vs. Goliath was sounding mighty smart. Shut my mouth.

"I'm proud of our guys," the elder Hawkins said. "It looked like the rout was on. We could have pulled our tents and gone home."

Hawkins had contributed to the torment with another of his fourth-down things — a "fumblerooski" fake on a punt. But we all should wish that he continues to be an imaginative riverboat gambler.

Colorado scored two touchdowns before halftime, and I was contemplating this opening line: "In the greatest comeback victory in CU history "

It was maybe the "greatest near-comeback in CU history."

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colorado notes

Laterals during last play look familiar to Buffs

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Colorado receiver Scotty McKnight tries to cut in front of Alabama's Kareem Jackson and make a catch in the end zone. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

SHREVEPORT, La. — It didn't quite match the game-winning, 15-lateral touchdown by Trinity University against Millsaps in October, but Colorado made Alabama fans hold their breath at the end of Sunday night's Independence

Bowl.

On the game's final play from the CU 20, quarterback Cody Hawkins completed a pass to Scotty McKnight for 15 yards. Then CU tossed multilaterals before Alabama made the game-ending tackle at CU's 45.

"We called a play and then it was 'Buff Ball,' " said CU coach Dan Hawkins, referring to a rugby-like game he invented to let players have fun after practices.

"It actually looked pretty good there for a while. Those 'Buff Ball' games paid off."

That didn't last long.

The Buffaloes

Colorado Football

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entered the game with 10 consecutive turnover-free bowl quarters. But Cody Hawkins was intercepted on CU's first offensive play.

Alabama middle linebacker Rolando McClain returned the pick 17 yards to the Colorado 15, setting up the first of three field goals by Leigh Tiffin.

Sea of red.

Colorado sold about 3,000 tickets to the game, and CU supporters were vastly outnumbered by Alabama fans. But Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said he was pleased with the support.

"The good thing is, the fans that are here and the team fully embraced the bowl experience and are having a great time," Bohn said.

Footnotes.

Colorado assistant coaches received bonuses totaling four weeks pay. As is customary for programs in BCS conferences, expenses for coaches' families to attend the bowl game were picked up by CU. That was not the case for Colorado's most recent bowl appearance, the 2005 Champs Sports Bowl in Orlando, Fla. "(CU) President (Hank) Brown was the leader in having us change some of that back," Bohn said. Alabama's 27-point run in the first half was the largest ever against Colorado in a bowl game. Mike Rhoades, the umpire in the game's Western Athletic Conference officiating crew, was taken to a hospital after suffering an apparent torn rotator cuff during the

first half. Rhoades had planned for this to be his final officiating assignment before retiring. Former Buff Chauncey Billups introduced the CU lineups during the ESPN telecast.

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TIMES-CALL

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Alabama slammer

Bufs mount giant comeback, but come up short in Independence Bowl vs. Alabama

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

SHREVEPORT, La. — If you turned off the Independence Bowl early in the second quarter, no one would have blamed you.

Colorado lost it Sunday, 30-24, to Alabama, falling behind in hideous fashion before finally flirting with what would have been the greatest comeback in program history. But their last chance came down to a Trinity College-style attempt at endless laterals leading to a touchdown after time had expired. Unmiraculously, it did not work.

The Buffs regained possession with 1.5 seconds to play and 80 yards to go, and their last gasp began with receiver Scotty McKnight catching a pass over the middle and tossing the first lateral. Eventually Alabama defenders cornered the ball on the sideline.

While such an ending would have been amazing, what's most memorable about the Buffs' effort in the Independence Bowl is their start, or lack thereof. CU, looking overwhelmed and confused early, trailed 27-0 before 18 minutes elapsed. Late in the second quarter, safety Ryan Walters intercepted a pass and the Buffs appeared revived from there, even dominating the rest of the night statistically.

But as CU coach Dan Hawkins says, statistics are for losers.

"We obviously had a hard time stopping them a little bit," Hawkins said.

"I'm proud of our guys for the way they continued to ball. It looked like the rout was on and it would have been easy for our guys to quit and go home. But they didn't."

The Buffs end 2007 at 6-7 and fell to 1-4 in bowls this decade. The defeat gave them consecutive losing seasons for the first time in 22 years, and losses in five of their final seven this season.

The Buffs were wildly inconsistent in 2007, and Sunday's beginning epitomized the season. The 27-point deficit was the largest CU has faced in a bowl game. But when Cody Hawkins hit Tyson DeVree with a 14-yard touchdown pass with 3 minutes, 51 seconds to go, hope appeared existent.

A mix of frustration and determination prevailed afterward, especially in Cody Hawkins, whose two interceptions led to two Alabama field goals, which was also the final margin. The latter came with 7:52 left, and helped the Crimson Tide go ahead, 30-17, with 4:36 to play. He defined the team's post-game mood as upset, but appeared to be taking it hardest himself.

"Not everybody in the first half threw two interceptions that cost his team the game," Cody Hawkins said.

The picks hurt, but not as much as CU's ugly start. Tide quarterback John Parker Wilson matched a single-game Independence Bowl record before halftime with three touchdown passes to earn offensive player of the game honors.



CU's Daniel Dykes (9) walks to the sideline while Alabama's D.J. Hall (22) and Keith Brown celebrate Brown's 15-yard touchdown reception during the first quarter of the ProSun Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La., on Sunday. **Times-Call / Lewis Geyer**

The Buffs offensive line struggled with Alabama's front seven, and CU's running game stalled.

In the second quarter, prior to Walters' pick, Alabama held an edge in yards gained of 271-52. From that point, the Buffs outgained the Tide, 345-117, and outscored Alabama, 24-3.

"I felt when we hit the field, we were ready," defensive tackle George Hypolite said.

"It was not us starting slow; they started really, really fast. It took us awhile to match their intensity. ... But you can't hit the field in third gear, you have to start in overdrive."

Said Cody Hawkins: "If we would not have started off by shooting ourselves in the foot 500 times in the first half, we win this game."

CU players uttered similar things after losing at Iowa State, and after Florida State. Colorado State and Oklahoma blew leads to CU in 2007 games in which the Buffs overcame double-digit deficits to win, and also walked away mumbling. Sunday night's ups and downs seemed appropriate for the 2007 Buffs.

Fifteen CU seniors played their last college games. Receiver Dusty Sprague and offensive linemen Tyler Polumbus appeared at a news conference afterward, smiling the whole time.

"It's hard to take off the black and gold for the last time," Sprague said. "It's been a great ride. I loved playing with these guys and I've been through a lot with them.

"We can say in a way we got the ship going in the right direction. I hope they can keep it sailing."

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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, December 31,
2007

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 12/31/2007

Consistency key to success next season

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call sports column

SHREVEPORT, La. — The mantra appeared to change.

Instead of start fast and finish strong, the Colorado Buffaloes went with start gassed and finish wrong Sunday at the Independence Bowl, where they ended their 2007 with a less-than-satisfying 30-24 loss to Alabama.

The Crimson Tide nearly blew a 27-0, second-quarter lead before clinging to an unglorious victory. As they departed, Alabama taunted CU with chants about beating the you-know-what out of the Buffs. It was a strange thing to hear for anyone who had just watched the game, but in Alabama, apparently, you do what you can with what you have.



CU's Tyrone Wheatley grimaces as he walks to the sideline after failing to stop an Alabama reception resulting in a touchdown during the ProSun Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La., on Sunday. **Times-Call/Lewis Geyer**

For CU and its football program, Sunday night mirrored the first two years of coach Dan Hawkins' tenure — awful start, hopeful ending. We sat around early wondering if we spent five days in Shreveport, La., for something so ugly. We left wondering why these CU Buffaloes can't play like those second-half CU Buffaloes more often.

There are reasons why the Buffs were so inconsistent in 2007, and one is certainly their abundant youth. Five freshman, including four true, started this bowl, CU's most in a bowl.

But the guarantee defensive tackle George Hypolite issued once this thing ended was curious to hear, considering that CU's youth won't turn into savvy experience overnight. Hypolite's guarantee is the kind that'd make Joe Namath crinkle his nose and go, "Huh?" Still, it's worth mentioning.

"I guarantee right now that the product we put on the field next year will be ready to compete for the Big 12 championship," said Hypolite, who, assuming he is not in the NFL next year, will be a force.

"I'm not saying we will win the Big 12. I'm just saying we will be ready to compete for it."

Crazier guarantees have been issued. And it wouldn't take a sucker to believe this one, though we know from the events that transpired this weekend at UCLA that a sucker is, without a doubt, born every minute.

More from big George.

"We're competitors ... and we want to win the national championship. That's where this program is headed," he said.

Keep in mind, CU lost to Missouri by 45 points. It lost at Kansas State by 27 and looked every bit for the first 18 minutes of Sunday's game that it would need a David-like effort to slay Goliath and its gleeful fans. Those questions from Saturday still seem absurd, especially with the way Alabama strutted early and crawled to the end.

Hypolite is smarter than me and if he truly believes CU is headed for a national title, so be it. But with that schedule and a team that'll still be pretty young, it's tough to see it soon.

Next year's senior class will tout the likes of Hypolite, safety Ryan Walters, center Daniel Sanders and linebacker Brad

Jones. But it will not be large, and the departures of Hugh Charles, Jordon Dizon and Terrence Wheatley leave gaping holes. Monstrous holes.

It's clear, though, that the future of this program is considerably brighter than its recent past. It's 2008 recruiting class will rank as its highest since 2003, and fewer opponents will possess so much more talent and speed as Alabama did.

"There were times I got caught from behind tonight, and I was just like, 'Wow.'" said Charles, one of CU's fastest players.

CU will have competition at every spot position, and the depth will be close to what Hawkins craves. But to compete with the best, CU needs consistency, something it sorely lacked in 2007, and the next challenge to meet.

That's a better guarantee to meet.

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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, December 31,
2007

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 12/31/2007

Trick play goes nowhere for CU

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

SHREVEPORT, La. — The Colorado Buffaloes used their idle time not to create a new trick play, but to reclaim one from the staff's past.

The Buffs tried a fake punt with a fumblerooski play in the first quarter of their 30-24 loss to Alabama on Sunday in the Independence Bowl. Coach Dan Hawkins said he and special teams coach Kent Riddle used the play from their tenure at Boise State.

Fullback Byron Ellis took the snap, bent over and pretended to snap the ball to Josh Smith as the receiver sped by. Ellis, however, held onto it, paused and then ran. He only gained a yard, and CU failed to convert a fourth-and-2 at the 45.

"Nearly every time we ran it with success, but one guy smelled it out," Hawkins said. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained. If it hits for a touchdown, then it's a whole new deal."

Hawkins said, "We'll see," on Saturday when asked if the Buffs might have a few tricks for Alabama. The Crimson Tide took over possession after the play at its 45 and drove for a touchdown to take a 13-0 lead.

INJURED REFEREE: Umpire Mike Rhoades tore his rotator cuff in the second quarter and left the game. He was taken to a local hospital. The game was his final one before retiring.

OFF THE HEAD: In one of the more comical moments of 2007, CU's Chase McBride took a punt off his head late in the second quarter. The ball eventually squirted out of bounds, giving the Buffs' possession.

CHARLES RETURNS KICKS: CU had said cornerback Terrence Wheatley would return kicks, but he did not. Hugh Charles handled duties, returning six for 126 yards.

EXTRA POINTS: Sunday's attendance was 47,043. CU used 8,000 of its 12,000 ticket allotment. Five thousand of the tickets were donated to area organizations and charities. ... Sunday marked what was believed to be the first time CU wore decals of the Colorado state flag on its helmets. ... Former CU hoops star Chauncey Billups introduced the Buffs for ESPN's telecast. ... CU had 98 players on hand for the bowl. Niney-four dressed. ... CU had 14 bowl practices, including four in Shreveport. ... CU offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus has received an invitation to the NFL Combine. ... Cody Hawkins' streak of 70 straight passes without an interception ended on his first pass of the game.

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



CU quarterback Cody Hawkins steps back for a pass against Alabama in the fourth quarter during the ProSun Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La., on Sunday. The ball was batted in the air and intercepted by Alabama.

Times-Call / Lewis Geyer



Colorado starts slowly, pays price against Alabama

By B.G. Brooks

Monday, December 31, 2007

The Colorado Buffaloes fulfilled Dan Hawkins' 2007 wish to reach a bowl game. If they reach the 2008 postseason, he might wish for the Buffs to not let play start without them.

Whether blinded by this city's not-so-bright lights or the tradition of its Southeastern Conference opponent, CU started the Independence Bowl as flat as the section of Interstate 20 that crawls west toward Bossier City.

Before it appeared the Buffs had realized the game was under way, the Crimson Tide owned a 27-0 lead. With the first portion of Hawkins' "start fast, finish strong" mantra obliterated, CU at least lived up to the last, finishing with a flourish but still losing 30-24 on Sunday night in Independence Stadium.

It was CU's second postseason loss to Alabama, which beat the Buffs in the 1991 Blockbuster Bowl. CU won the initial bowl match, beating the Crimson Tide in the 1969 Liberty Bowl.

"We obviously had a hard time starting," Hawkins said. "But I'm proud of our guys; it looked like the rout was on, and we could have folded our tent and gone home."

Instead, the Buffs began their journey back to Boulder and winter conditioning work with a 6-7 record. Coupled with Hawkins' 2-10 debut campaign, it marks the first time in 22 years they've suffered back-to-back losing seasons.

After its horrendous start, CU finally shook itself awake and scored two late second-quarter touchdowns to trail 27-14 at halftime. Limiting the Crimson Tide to only three second-half points, the Buffs scored 10 and got the ball back with 1.5 seconds to play at their 20-yard line.

Trailing by six points and needing a miracle, they got a completion from Cody Hawkins to Scotty McKnight, then three laterals that took the ball across midfield into Crimson Tide territory, where the season ended unceremoniously.

"I felt when we hit the field, we were ready," CU defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "It wasn't us starting slow; they just started really, really fast. It took us a while to match their intensity."

"You can't start in third gear. You have to start in overdrive."

Whatever gear the Buffs were or weren't in, the Crimson Tide started with two Leigh Tiffin field goals to go up 6-0, then rode the arm of quarterback John Parker Wilson to their 27-0 advantage. Finishing with 256 yards passing (19-for-32, one interception) and three touchdowns, he was named the game's most valuable offensive player.

Had CU been more efficient opening and closing, the award might have gone to Buffs quarterback Hawkins. Passing for a career-high 322 yards, Hawkins completed 24-of-39 passes and matched Wilson's touchdown total. Hawkins' 24 completions went to 10 receivers.

But Hawkins threw two interceptions - the first on CU's first offensive play - that won't comfort him through the offseason. Neither will the tipped ball Alabama got in the second half.

"It was definitely tough, it put us in a hole," he said of the first interception. "It gave (Alabama) a little spark, just like (CU safety) Ryan Walters' interception did for us."

The Crimson Tide rushed for 100 yards in the first half but managed only 32 in the second while the Buffs were rallying. Hawkins' passing accounted for the bulk of CU's offense; the Buffs managed only 75 yards rushing.

Alabama's chief run buster was defensive end Wallace Gilberry, the game's most valuable defensive player.

"Things happen for a reason and I think maybe the way we won this game is the best thing that could have happened to us," he said. "That is a good team we played (Sunday night), and it was a great battle."

Alabama coach Nick Saban also lauded CU's comeback but said his team "made some mistakes . . . and let them come back. We took the challenge and actually competed and showed some great competitive character in the second half to do the things we needed to do to win the game."

Alabama 30, Colorado 24

Alabama 20 7 0 3 - 30

Colorado 0 14 3 7 - 24

First quarter

Ala - FG Tiffin 41, 11:30.

Ala - FG Tiffin 24, 9:13.

Ala - Brown 15 pass from Wilson (Tiffin kick), 5:09.

Ala - Caddell 34 pass from Wilson (Tiffin kick), 1:31.

Second quarter

Ala - Stover 31 pass from Wilson (Tiffin kick), 12:20.

Col - DeVree 4 pass from C.Hawkins (Eberhart kick), 2:05.

Col - Sprague 25 pass from C.Hawkins (Eberhart kick), :04.

Third quarter

Col - FG Eberhart 39, 3:00.

Fourth quarter

Ala - FG Tiffin 26, 4:36.

Col - DeVree 14 pass from C.Hawkins (Eberhart kick), 3:51.

A - 47,043.

Ala Col

First downs 22 19

Rushes-yards 37-132 28-75

Passing 256 322

Comp-Att-Int 19-32-1 24-40-2

Return Yards 17 35

Punts-Avg. 4-45.0 4-25.8

Fumbles-Lost 2-1 1-0

Penalties-Yards 4-21 4-30

Time of Possession 29:39 30:21

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING - Alabama, Coffee 19-72, Upchurch 12- 34, Wilson 4-24, Caddell 1-12, Stover 1-(minus 10). Colorado, Charles 14-69, Sprague 2-14, Dykes 3-10, Ellis 5-6, Lockridge 2-(minus 8), C.Hawkins 2-(minus 16).

PASSING - Alabama, Wilson 19-32-1-256. Colorado, C.Hawkins 24-39-2-322, Team 0-1-0-0.

RECEIVING - Alabama, Caddell 4-76, D.Hall 4-58, N.Walker 4-38, Stover 2-35, Upchurch 2-23, Coffee 2- 11, Brown 1-15. Colorado, DeVree 9-94, McKnight 4- 67, Dykes 2-40, Sprague 2-30, Williams 2-29, Robinson 2-12, Lockridge 1-22, J.Sanders 1-13, J.Behrens 1-5, D.Sanders 0-10.

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'SMOOTH' INTRO

Former University of Colorado basketball standout **Chauncey "Smooth" Billups** took his turn introducing the Buffaloes starters Sunday night. Billups, the Most Valuable Player in the 2004 NBA Finals, followed South Park's **Eric Cartman**, above, who introduced the Buffs before the Nebraska game.

NUMBERS GAME

6 **touchdown passes** (three by each team) set an Independence Bowl record for most scoring passes in a game. Alabama's **John Parker Wilson** and CU's **Cody Hawkins** tied bowl records for touchdown passes with three each.

PICKING, GRINNING

The Buffs entered the game Sunday night with at least one interception in their past 13 postseason appearances. That streak was kept alive by junior safety **Ryan Walters'** second-quarter theft that led to CU's first touchdown.

EARLY OUT

Umpire **Mike Rhoades**, of the Western Athletic Conference, was taken to a local hospital after suffering a torn left rotator cuff in the first quarter. He was working his final game before retirement.

STREAK SNAPPED

Before his first pass attempt Sunday night, CU quarterback **Cody Hawkins** had thrown 70 consecutive passes without an interception. On the Buffs' first play from scrimmage, Hawkins was picked off by middle linebacker **Rolando McClain**, eventually leading to a 6-0 Crimson Tide lead.

HE SAID IT

"So much for our start-fast plan. Alabama had some big mojo plays early. . . . We dug ourselves a hole early."

Dan Hawkins, on his Buffs falling behind 27-0.

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Independence Bowl: Alabama 30, Buffaloes 24

By B.G. Brooks

Originally published 09:26 p.m., December 30, 2007

Updated 11:02 p.m., December 30, 2007

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Before it appeared the Buffs had realized the game was underway, the Crimson Tide owned a 27-0 lead. With the first portion of Hawkins' "start fast, finish strong" mantra obliterated, CU at least lived up to the last, finishing with a flourish but still losing 30-24 in Independence Stadium.

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Trailing by six points and needing a miracle, they got a completion from Cody Hawkins to Scotty McKnight, then three laterals that took the ball across midfield into Crimson Tide territory, where the season ended unceremoniously.

"I felt when we hit the field we were ready," CU defensive tackle George Hypolite claimed. "It wasn't us starting slow, they just started really, really fast. It took us a while to match their intensity."

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But Hawkins threw a pair of interceptions – the first on CU's first offensive play – that won't comfort him through the off-season. Neither will the tipped ball Alabama got in the second half.

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Alabama coach Nick Saban also lauded CU's comeback, but said his team "made some mistakes . . . and let them come back. We took the challenge and actually competed and showed some great competitive character in the second half to do the things we needed to do to win the game."

The Crimson Tide's bowl record improved to 31-21-3, while the Buffs' slipped to 12-16. Saban now is 4-5 in postseason play while Dan Hawkins is 2-3.

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2007 Independence Bowl: Bama bounces Buffs

December 31, 2007

By Scott Ferrell

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After struggling to score points in its last three games, the Alabama Crimson Tide bolted to a 27-point first-half lead and held on for a 30-24 win over Colorado on Sunday night in the PetroSun Independence Bowl.

"We had some ups and downs tonight but we kept our composure and finished the game," said Alabama quarterback John Parker Wilson, who earned Offensive Player of the Game honors after passing for 256 yards and three touchdowns.

Alabama (7-6) scored just 36 points in its last three regular-season games.

On Sunday, the Tide had 20 in the first quarter alone and led 27-0 early in the second quarter. Wilson threw all three of his touchdown passes during that span.



Alabama players, led by wide receiver Keith Brown (81), celebrate their 30-24 victory over Colorado in the 32nd PetroSun Independence Bowl on Sunday night in Shreveport. (Douglas Collier/The Times)

"I don't know the answer to why we started like that," Colorado offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus said. "Bowl games are just funny sometimes."

Colorado, though, revived its offense after a Ryan Waters interception of a Wilson pass in the second quarter. Buffaloes quarterback Cody Hawkins threw a pair of touchdown passes to cut the Alabama lead to 27-14 at the half.

Hawkins finished with 24-of-39 passing for 322 yards, three touchdowns and two interceptions.

Colorado's Kevin Eberhart kicked a 39-yard field goal that hit the upright and bounced through to cut the deficit to 27-17 in the third quarter. But Eberhart also had a missed 48-yard field goal attempt earlier in the period.

Alabama got its only points of the second half after linebacker Darrin Mustin intercepted a deflected pass at the Colorado 22 in the fourth quarter.

The Crimson Tide settled for a 26-yard field goal from Leigh Tiffin — his third of the night — for a 30-17 advantage.

Colorado (6-7) quickly answered with a five-play, 69-yard drive that took only 45 seconds. Hawkins passed 14 yards to Tyson DeVree to bring the Buffs with 30-24. DeVree had a pair of touchdown catches in the game for Buffaloes.

Colorado never got the defensive stop it needed. Alabama held possession until punting the football away and giving Colorado only 1 second on the game clock.

"I think maybe the way we won this game is the best thing that could have happened," Defensive Player of the Game Wallace Gilberry of Alabama said. "That is a good team that we played tonight and it was a great battle."

The win for Alabama comes just a year after losing to Oklahoma State in the Independence Bowl, 34-31.

This year, Alabama will have the momentum of a bowl win to take into the offseason.

"It's great for our seniors to go out as winners, with a winning season," Alabama coach Nick Saban said. "It's great for the players to come back and learn the lessons of this season. Hopefully we'll be able to build on that."

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December 31, 2007

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Alabama, Colorado fans display their team devotion

December 31, 2007

By Jimmy Watson

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There were a lot of fanatical Alabama and Colorado fans attending Sunday's PetroSun Independence Bowl, but it would be hard to top Hartselle, Ala., resident Tim Witt.

Witt and his wife have two sons — a 2-year-old named Tide and an 8-month-old carrying the moniker, Saban, after the former LSU, Miami Dolphins and current Alabama coach.

"My wife thought I was freakin' crazy when I wanted to name him that, but now she's OK with it," Witt said.

"I've been on just about every radio and television station in the state because of it, so Saban (his son) has gotten a lot of pub."

Boulder, Colo., resident Steve Smith and four of his buddies are still Colorado students, so they don't have any children named Hawkins or Buffalo, but they did have a memorable visit to the Shreveport-Bossier City area "» sort of.

Clad only in shorts and shoes, and with their upper bodies painted black and gold and "F-BAMA" inscribed on their backs, the economics and pre-med majors flew into Shreveport on Saturday morning. The quintet spent Saturday night at RWB Dancehall in the Louisiana Boardwalk.

"We got drunk and lost two cameras, two wallets, a jacket and a cell phone sometime during the night," Smith said. "We just woke up this morning and they were gone. We spent the day rehydrating and looking for our missing items "» to no avail."

With no jackets and just one T-shirt between them, the Colorado crew got downright chilly during the game after unseasonable 60-degree temperatures dipped into the 40s after the sun disappeared.

And it didn't help the quintet's feelings that Alabama slipped by the Buffaloes 30-24 on Sunday night.

Still, the Colorado and Alabama contingents had mixed feelings about spending a portion of their holidays in northwest Louisiana.

"Honestly, I didn't want to come here, because we were hoping for a better bowl," said Alabama fan Willie Allen, who has seen every home and away Crimson Tide game for 13 consecutive seasons. "But at 6-6, we were lucky to be anywhere. I'd rather be here than where South Carolina is "» nowhere."

While Shreveport and Bossier City received some scathing attacks from national media columnists over the past couple of weeks, the pageantry of the 32nd annual contest didn't seem to deter a near-sellout crowd from enjoying the multiple festivities.

The State Fair midway was packed until game time with vendors selling everything from houndstooth hats (Alabama) to foam buffalo hats (Colorado). All Sports Novelties vendor Rodger Posey said it was no contest about which school was selling the best.

"Alabama gear for sure. About 3 to 1 over Colorado," Posey said. "We've probably sold about five of the foam heads (at \$30)."

Shreveport Rubber and Gasket owner Boyd Parker, father of Independence Bowl Executive Director Missy Setters, was busy grilling steaks and sausages for his out-of-town visitors.



Young Alabama fans before the start of the 2007 Petrosun Independence Bowl. (Stan Carpenter/The Times)

[Zoom Photo](#)



Colorado fans go wild in the street before the start of the Independence Bowl in Shreveport. (Stan Carpenter/The Times)

Photo Galleries:



[Fans and VIP's at Indy Bowl](#)

There is no charge to sample Parker's cooking, but for the first time this year, donations were accepted for the Caddo sheriff's office Safety Town, designed to protect children by teaching them safety skills.

"We've raised upward of \$700 through donations today, so this is fantastic," Sgt. Richard Corbett said. "Mr. Parker and his crew have really helped us out, and we appreciate it."

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Colorado Notes: Ralphie makes impressive entrance to stadium

December 31, 2007

By Jimmy Watson

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When Ralphie roared onto the Independence Stadium turf just prior to the kickoff in the 32nd annual PetroSun Independence Bowl, the female buffalo cleared a path as it circled the field.

Although the massive animal is the most intimidating mascot in college football, with apologies to LSU's Mike the Tiger, she appeared to almost run out of gas before making the 200-plus-yard run.

The buffalo also didn't get to see any of the game. After finishing her run, she was loaded into an enclosed, black trailer and hauled out of the arena. Ralphie also didn't do much to inspire the Colorado team that she led onto the field.

Defenseless: Colorado's defense gave up huge chunks of yardage to Alabama on the Crimson Tide's first series, before stiffening in the red zone and allowing a 41-yard Leigh Tiffin field goal. After Alabama freshman Rolando McClain intercepted Cody Hawkins on his first series, the Colorado defense again held the Tide to a 24-yard Tiffin field goal. The pick was Colorado's first turnover in 11 bowl quarters, dating back to the 2002 Alamo Bowl, when Robert Hodge threw an interception against Wisconsin.

But those were the defensive highlights for the Buffs for several series as Alabama got touchdown passes from John Parker Wilson on its next three series to take a commanding 27-0 lead just 3 minutes into the second quarter.

Unoffensive: Colorado's defense wasn't helped by an inept offensive display early in the contest. The Buffs managed just 22 total yards in the first quarter on 11 plays, while Alabama rang up 170 yards.

Easy pickin's: Colorado now has now picked off at least one pass in 14 consecutive bowl games, after safety Ryan Walters nabbed a Wilson pass with just under 6 minutes to play in the first half.

Walters returned the pick 35 yards to the Alabama 43-yard-line. Eight plays later, Cody Hawkins found Tyson DeVree for a 4-yard score to cut Alabama's lead to 27-7.

Headly play: Colorado kick returner Chase McBride had one of the more memorable attempts at fielding a punt in Independence Bowl history.

With just over a minute remaining before half, McBride reached his arms skyward for a punt only to have the ball bounce off his helmet. Several Alabama defenders had an opportunity to recover the ball but it bounced safely out of bounds.

One minute and six plays later Colorado trimmed the Alabama lead to 27-14.

Early checkout: We're not sure whether the Buffaloes anticipated their poor early first half showing in the Independence Bowl, but they definitely made advance plans not to stick around for any postgame activities.

According to the CU media sheet, the Buffs were scheduled to leave Shreveport at 12:45 a.m. on a Frontier charter and arrive in Denver at 2:15 a.m.

State pride: Colorado wore its traditional black jerseys with gold pants, but had what many believed was a historical addition to the team's helmets.

CU coach Dan Hawkins had equipment manager J.T. Galloway secure decals of the Colorado state flag and had them secured to the Colorado's gold helmets for what school officials believe is the first time.

Name dropping: After having South Park's Eric Cartman introduce the Colorado lineups for the regular season finale against Nebraska (the creators are CU alums), the Buffs gave the honor to 2004 NBA Finals MVP Chauncey Billups for Sunday's ESPN-televvised contest.



Colorado mascot Ralphie makes her way onto the field with guidance from her handlers before the start of the 32nd PetroSun Independence Bowl from Independence Stadium in Shreveport on Sunday.

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Moving up: The 2007 season didn't go the way Dan Hawkins had it planned, but the Colorado coach said postgame that the season wasn't a loss, despite the 30-24 loss to Alabama in the Independence Bowl.

"Nobody is happy with 6-7. Everyone wants to be 13-0," Hawkins said. "You'd love to win your last game because that helps get your juices flowing in the offseason. But we made some strides this year in moving this program forward."

Gin anyone?: Buffalo defensive tackle George Hypolite said his team will have the ability to be in contention for a Big 12 title next season.

"We're a competitive bunch and I don't like to lose at anything," Hypolite said. "Even if I play my grandmother in gin, I want to win. We came up on the short end tonight, but we kept fighting."

Hypolite said the slow start was difficult for the Buffs to overcome.

"It took us a while to match their intensity, but we can take something from this," Hypolite said. "We realize now that when you're in a game like this you have to hit the field in overdrive."

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Teddy Allen: Tide swamps Colorado's 'start-fast plan'

December 31, 2007

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For the Colorado Buffaloes, here's a discouraging word from the range:

First quarter.

Actually, that's two words. But for Colorado in Sunday's night's 30-24 loss to Alabama in the PetroSun Independence Bowl, the first quarter was double discouraging.

In the first 15 game minutes, the Buffaloes played as if they'd stepped in something. And Alabama played like it was wearing tear-away jerseys and the year was 1965 or 1979 or any of those other glory years the Tide rolled to a national championship.

Not nearly such a big enchilada was at stake in the 32nd annual I-Bowl officially attended by 47,043. When it was over, all Alabama had won was a championship of mediocrity. Bama finished its disappointing season 7-6, Colorado finished 6-7, and both teams will hope to climb to more familiar territory of conference title contention next year.

When they do, each might do well to consider the first quarter of Sunday night's game, Bama for what it did right, the Buffaloes for what they did wrong. Consider Colorado's tale of first quarter woe:

Colorado was intercepted on its first play from scrimmage, failed to convert a first down off a fake punt, then failed to convert a 3rd-and-16 after a bad snap/fumble on second down.

Alabama took advantage of the stumbling Buffaloes, who were playing as if they were still on Rocky Mountain Time and nowhere near Independence Stadium. It was 20-0 after the first quarter, and 27-0 early in the second quarter after Alabama partially blocked a punt to set up a 31-yard touchdown pass to Nikita Stover from John Parker Wilson, who threw a touchdown pass for each of his three first names in the first half.

"So much for our start-fast plan," said Colorado coach Dan Hawkins. "Alabama had some big mojo plays early, took advantage of some of it not all of our mistakes."

A few things besides bad mojo and the plain-and-simple score might have alerted Colorado at this point that it was in deep Crimson waters. One, the biggest comeback in school history was in 1978 and was from a deficit of only 20 points. Two, Alabama had just equaled its best single-quarter point total for a bowl game in its storied history, matching a couple of 20-point quarters back in the 1953 Orange Bowl. And three — and this was the most alarming — the 'Bama quarterback was not playing like the same John Parker Wilson who had thrown just one touchdown and five interceptions since the Nov. 3 loss to LSU. Instead, Wilson was quarterbacking like former Tide lettermen Kenny Stabler and Joe Willie Namath.

So with the game so houndstoothy, no one noticed much when Wilson turned back into Wilson for a moment and threw an interception that led to Colorado's first touchdown.

But you did get the feeling the tide might turn on Colorado's next possession. That's when the Buffaloes punt returner had the kick hit him square in the helmet. He was cradling his arms for the catch and — doink! — right in the hat. But instead of hurting the Buffs, the ball bounced forward and out of bounds and, just before the half ended, Cody Hawkins, Colorado's freshman quarterback, threw a 25-yard touchdown pass to Dusty Sprague to make it plenty of game, 27-14, at the half.

Hawkins, after the first-chunk interception, finished the half 11-of-16 for 98 yards and two TD tosses. Maybe momentum hadn't shifted, but the Buffalo bleeding had stopped.

Colorado had plenty of chances to score in the third quarter when it had the ball 25 plays to Alabama's five. But the Buffs could get only a lone field goal, and 'Bama matched that midway through the fourth quarter to maintain its halftime lead of 13 points, 30-17. The Tide defense earned that field goal, pressuring Hawkins into a tipped-pass interception deep in Colorado territory.

Remember how Wilson at times looked like those storied Tide quarterbacks of years ago, when Alabama was going 10-1 and 11-0 every year and either winning the national championship or scaring the devil out of whoever did win it? Hawkins had a similar moment in the fourth for Colorado when he led the Buffaloes, Kordell Stewart and Koy Detmer-like, on a 69-yard, 5-play drive that took just 45 seconds and ended with him chunking a 14-yard touchdown pass, his second of the night to tight end Tyson DeVree, to make it 30-24 with less than four minutes to go.

And that might have made a difference, had Wilson not pulled one more Alabama ghost out of the bag. His 14-yard scramble — can anyone say Johnny Musso? — helped keep 'Bama's final drive alive and milked so much clock that Colorado had time for only one unsuccessful pass of desperation — meaning the Buffaloes' night ended pretty much the same way it had begun, way behind, and hoping.

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Colorado can't recover from early stumbles

December 31, 2007

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For much of the first half, nothing worked for Colorado in the 32nd PetroSun Independence Bowl on Sunday. The offense sputtered, the defense had gaping holes in its coverage and the special teams suffered two breakdowns.

Whatever the Buffaloes did was a precursor to an Alabama score. Everything changed in the final 2:05 of the half.

"We had a little trouble finding our rhythm at the start, and we could not convert third downs," Colorado head coach Dan Hawkins said. "We also allowed them to convert third downs in the beginning.

"I think that we needed to settle down and get in a groove."

Quarterback Cody Hawkins finally got his game and the offense aligned. Hawkins had a pitiful first quarter that extended through much of the second quarter.



Colorado's Jake Behrens heads downfield after catching a short pass from Cody Hawkins in the second quarter of the PetroSun Independence Bowl at Independence Stadium in Shreveport on Sunday. (Shane Bevel/The Times)

The Buffaloes didn't just need a game-changing moment. They needed something to get on track. Free safety Ryan Walters supplied it.

Walters intercepted Alabama's John Parker Wilson late in the second quarter and returned it 35 yards to the Alabama 43. The play was the catalyst the Buffaloes' offense craved, but it was a long time coming.

"It turned the momentum around and got us back in it," Walters said of his interception. "We came out flat in the first half."

Alabama scored 27 unanswered points to start the game, and Colorado fans had to wonder if their offense would ever find the end zone.

The offense had just one first down and didn't make it past the Alabama 45 in the opening quarter.

And it wasn't just the offense that sputtered.

The secondary had gaping holes in its coverage which Wilson easily dissected. Wilson threw touchdown passes of 15, 34 and 31 yards to three different receivers.

Colorado linebacker and All-American Jordon Dizon, who finished second in the nation in career tackles, had just six stops in the first half.

Not even the special teams were exempt from the ineffectiveness.

Punter Matt DiLallo had a punt partially blocked by Matt Caddell early in the second quarter. That led to Wilson's third touchdown and a 27-0 Alabama lead.

An Alabama punt before halftime glanced off returner Chase McBride's helmet before skidding out-of-bounds at the Colorado 36.

"I do not think that we started that slow," defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "Alabama just started real fast. Once we matched their intensity, we started to come back.

"In bowl games, you cannot hit the field in third or fourth gear. You have to hit the field in overdrive."

While the Crimson Tide's offense chewed up time and yardage, the Buffs offense had little time to string together a drive of any significance — until Walters' interception.

The interception especially invigorated Hawkins.

In the first quarter, Hawkins was 1-of-4 passing for 6 yards and an interception.

By halftime, he was 11-of-16 for 98 yards and two touchdowns. He was most impressive with the Buffs' final two scoring drives of the half.

He threw a soft 4-yard touchdown pass to tight end Tyson DeVree at the back of the end zone with 2:05 remaining.

Just before halftime, he led the Buffaloes on a quick 6-play drive over 55 yards that ended with a great pass-and-catch with Dusty Sprague.

Hawkins hit Sprague with a 25-yard touchdown pass to cut the Alabama lead, 27-14. Through the two scoring drives, Hawkins was 8-of-10 for 89 yards.

"That is what Colorado football is all about," DeVree said. "We never give up. They came out and hit us in the mouth early, that is for sure, but we fought back hard.

"We gave it all we had, but we just ran out of time."

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