



Bufs ready for No. 21 WVU

Mountaineers visit Folsom for nationally televised affair

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

When members of the Colorado football team charge on to Folsom Field tonight to face No. 21 West Virginia under the lights of a rocking stadium filled with fans clad in black, memories of last season's game against Florida State probably will be present.

How the Buffs use those thoughts could play a part in tonight's outcome.

The Buffs lost to the Seminoles one year and three days ago in a very similar non-conference tilt. It was a night game seen around the nation. It was the first of what has become an annual "Blackout" game, with fans encouraged to wear nothing but black. It was against a speedy, athletic program from the east perceived to be superior in nearly every way.

And Colorado easily could have won. Maybe it should have.

The Buffs grew from the experience of walking off the field that night 16-6 losers. They were angry at themselves in the locker room, feeling like they had allowed their first big win under coach Dan Hawkins to slip away. They built on it and used it to guide them to a come-from-behind victory over then-No. 3 Oklahoma two weeks later.

If nothing else is working in their favor tonight, the Buffs at least have this: They shouldn't be overwhelmed by the moment this time. They've been here and done this.

"If you look at last year, we were on national TV just about every game we played," linebacker Jeff Smart said. "...It's a lot of fun. You have a great atmosphere here in Folsom Field and all the fans come out and there is a lot of electricity."

Tonight's game begins a brutal stretch of ranked teams and difficult road games that will take them Buffs into November before any break arrives. This is the first of four consecutive games against members of the current top-25. The Buffs also have contests against Missouri, Kansas State and at Texas A&M coming over the next seven weeks.

But getting ahead themselves would be a huge mistake and one coach Dan Hawkins' teams have not been prone to making during his short tenure in Boulder. Players would never admit it publicly, but many of them have been looking forward to this game all summer. It's a test and a hefty challenge they face to-night in trying to get their rushing offense on track against a fast and tricky defense. Meanwhile, the CU defense must contain explosive threats in West Virginia quarterback Pat White and tailback Noel Devine.

White is likely to complete his career this season as the all-time rushing leader in college football history among quarterbacks. This is the third consecutive year he will at least receive mention when it comes to the Heisman Trophy race.

The Mountaineers are coming off a loss to East Carolina in Week 2 which pushed them out of the top 10 in the polls, a position they have become accustomed to. They are one of four programs in the nation to finish each of the past three seasons ranked among the top 10 in the major polls.

"They're obviously one of the best teams in the country, and deservedly so," Hawkins said. "They have a lot of talent and have a Heisman-type quarterback. Offensively, they have a ton of speed. They're very fast. The whole line is very physical, and they're always coming defensively. They give you a lot of problems, with all the places that they come from. And they're always good on special teams. So there's a reason they're ranked."

Colorado comes into the game a little more healthy than it has been in the first two games of the season. Tight end Riar Geer returns from minor knee surgery and a spring suspension and cornerbacks Jimmy Smith and Anthony Wright also will be available.

Playmakers such as wide receiver/kick return man Josh Smith and freshman running backs Darrell Scott and Rodney Stewart get their chance to introduce themselves to the nation. Each has made an impact in the Buffs' 2-0 start. CU is trying to go 3-0 for the first time since 2004 and only the second time since 1998.

The Mountaineers haven't lost two consecutive games since 2004, but they are under new management this season with veteran coach Bill Stewart calling the shots and former coach Rich Rodriguez now in Michigan. Stewart spoke in glowing terms about the Buffs in the buildup this week, even giving the CU defense credit for not allowing a 100-yard rusher since 2004, which is far from reality. Stewart called himself an admirer of Hawkins and CU quarterback Cody Hawkins.

Most teams endure some bumps in the road on the heels of a coaching change and the college football world should have a better idea with tonight's outcome whether the Mountaineers loss to ECU was a bad day or a sign of larger problems.

"We got beat (Sept. 6) and we've got to let that go," Stewart said. "The players have to let that go and the coaches have to let that go. We have to set our sights on what is there for us.

"What's there for us is 10 games. This is game three. After this one, we have nine more and if we do well in game three, four, five and so on, we'll be granted a 13th game. If we don't do well, then we won't. This is game three and it brings excitement and a spark with it."

CU in 2008

Aug. 31 -- CU 38, Colorado St. 17

Sept. 6 -- CU 31 Eastern Washington 24

Sept. 13 -- Bye

Sept. 18 -- WEST VIRGINIA, 6:30 p.m., ESPN

Sept. 27 -- Florida State (at Jacksonville), 1:30 p.m., ESPN/ABC

Oct. 4 -- TEXAS

Oct. 11 -- at Kansas

Oct. 18 -- KANSAS STATE

Oct. 25 -- at Missouri

Nov. 1 -- at Texas A&M

Nov. 8 -- IOWA STATE

Nov. 15 -- OKLAHOMA STATE

Nov. 28 -- at Nebraska, 1:30 p.m., ABC



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Colorado vs. West Virginia matchups

CU RUN OFFENSE VS. WVU RUN DEFENSE -- The Buffs struggled to get anything going on the ground in their last outing, and West Virginia allowed East Carolina to grind up 143 yards on the ground. The Mountaineers have allowed both opponents this season to gain more than 130 yards rushing. The Buffs get tight end Riar Geer back and junior guard Devin Head returns from suspension. Blocking the 3-3-5 defense will create problems at times for the young Colorado line, but offensive line coach Jeff Grimes was frustrated by his group's performance in Week 2 and has been working overtime to get things fixed. Freshman running backs Darrell Scott and Rodney Stewart are nice blend of shiftiness and power. Both sides have their moments in this area. **Edge: EVEN.**

CU PASS OFFENSE VS. WVU PASS DEFENSE -- This is a big test for CU quarterback Cody Hawkins, who comes into the game completing 72 percent of his passes. WVU is always tough in the passing game and has a history of making big plays. Hawkins needs solid protection from his line and can't force throws into bad spots as he has done on occasion in the past. If he plays smart and takes care of the ball, the Buffs should be able to move the ball through the air, convert some third downs and get a few big plays. Having Geer back in the lineup will be big. West Virginia can get to the quarterback and will test the youthful Buffs with plenty of creativity in blitzing. The Mountaineers are going to put pressure on Hawkins, but in his 16th consecutive start, he ought to be able to handle it. WVU has a lot of young players on this side of the ball who might be vulnerable. **Edge: CU.**

WVU RUN OFFENSE VS. CU RUN DEFENSE -- It's no secret defensive coordinator Ron Collins' units have struggled against dual-threat quarterbacks. And none of the guys the Buffs have faced in the past two years under Collins do the dual-threat thing as well as Pat White does it. Throw in speedy Noel Devine at tailback and an experienced offensive line and the Mountaineers are likely to be the first team to net more than 100 yards against the Buffs this season. CU's statistics in this area are skewed because they faced a pass-happy Eastern Washington team in Week 2 that doesn't run much. Still the Buffs have been pretty solid against the run to this point and have a veteran group in the front seven. Both groups ought to make some plays, but given the Buffs history against athletic QBs, the Mountaineers get the edge here. **Edge: WVU.**

WVU PASS OFFENSE VS. CU PASS DEFENSE -- The vast majority of the Mountaineers statistics through the air came in their opener. They struggled badly in Week 2. The Buffs will obviously employ some of what gave White problems, but WVU will have fixed some things and added more to its arsenal. White has never blown anyone away with his passing, but he gets the job done more often than not. He came into the season with twice as many touchdowns as interceptions in his career, but he's never thrown for more than 2,000 yards in a season. The Buffs must disrupt him and keep him contained at the same time. It's a difficult task. CU gets sophomore cornerback Jimmy Smith back. The Buffs are allowing a 66-percent completion rate, which needs to come down, but they have improved at limiting big plays and getting off the field on third downs over last year. That has to continue in this game or they're in trouble. **Edge: EVEN.**

SPECIAL TEAMS -- Aside from a missed field goal and Josh Smith fumbles, the Buffs have been explosive here with game-changing plays in each of the first two games. West Virginia hasn't given up a kickoff return for a touchdown since 1990, but it does have a more recent history of punt returns for

scores and allowing some blocked kicks. Aric Goodman believes he can make a kick to win the game for the Buffs from as far out as 60 yards. WVU kicker Pat McAfee is the second leading scorer among kickers in school history and is definitely the more tested player here. The West Virginia return game can be every bit as explosive as the Buffs' with Noel Devine likely the fastest player on the field tonight. CU has already given up a return for a touchdown. **Edge: EVEN.**

COACHING -- Dan Hawkins has the edge in terms of the number of games spent on the sidelines as a head coach, but Bill Stewart has been doing this for 30 years. The signature win for both men came last season when each beat Bob Stoops' Oklahoma Sooners. Hawkins has a history of gambling with some fourth-down calls and praised Denver Broncos coach Mike Shanahan for going for two to beat San Diego last week. Hawkins has also gotten himself in trouble (see Iowa State 2007) with some of his decisions. Many see this as a huge game for Hawkins in the development of his program here, but it's just as big for Stewart, who is trying to get his team to regroup and respond with a solid outing after a deflating loss. **Edge: EVEN.**

PREDICTION -- West Virginia 31-28

-- Kyle Ringo



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Woelk: Opportunity awaits Buffaloes

By Neill Woelk

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

Dan Hawkins calls it a "watershed" game.

That's an apt description. If you want to see just how far the Colorado Buffaloes have progressed under Hawk, the third game of his third season at the helm isn't a bad place to start.

Of course, it's not just tonight's game against No. 21 West Virginia that will serve as a barometer. If you want to look at the big picture, the next four games -- all against teams currently ranked in the Associated Press Top 25 -- will be a stiff measure of just how much the Buffs have improved in Hawk's tenure.

West Virginia, Florida State, Texas and Kansas. It's a brutal stretch, and certainly one not many coaches would line up if they had their choice.

But the Buffs -- perhaps not old enough to know better -- are embracing the opportunity presented them.

The Mountaineers are the type of program the Buffs aspire to emulate. (Well, without the part where the coach bolts at the end of the year for more money, then has the audacity to try to weasel out of the contract he signed a year earlier).

West Virginia hasn't lost back-to-back games since the end of the 2004 season. Since then, they've put up a 34-6 record, played in three bowl games -- including two BCS bowls -- and finished in the top 10 three straight seasons.

That's the type of test that will tell you in a hurry if you are indeed ready to play with the big boys.

Two weeks ago, someone in this corner suggested that Colorado needed to use the Eastern Washington game as a final dress rehearsal for tonight's game.

That day, the Buffs did not look ready for prime time.

Twelve days later, the Buffs have no choice -- they'll have a national television audience to themselves against one of the nation's premier programs.

Ready or not, the Mountaineers are here, and they aren't happy. A loss to East Carolina in their last game knocked them out of the top 10, and already, new coach Bill Stewart is under fire.

In fact, rumor from back east is that the Mountaineers spent the last two weeks going back to the basics on offense in hopes of fixing some of the problems that plagued them against East Carolina. But the Buffs can't be worried about the Mountaineers' problems. The Buffs have plenty of their own, issues CU

fans hope were addressed in the days since the Eastern Washington game.

Such as:

CU's defense must stay disciplined. WVU quarterback Pat White is as good as there is in the college game. If Colorado's defenders -- particularly the defensive line and linebackers -- don't stick with their assignments tonight, if they freelance and try to cut corners, White will make them pay.

A more productive running game. The Buffs' rushing attack was anemic the last time out, thanks in large part to a young CU offensive line that was exposed by a smaller but faster Eastern Washington front. Guaranteed, the Mountaineers are bigger *and* faster than the Eagles. Here's hoping the Buffs figure out a way to get Darrell Scott and Rodney Stewart involved from the get-go and establish some momentum.

Fewer turnovers. Last time out, the Buffs handed their opponent 14 points on a platter. Seven came on a fumble deep in CU territory, seven more came on an interception return. If Buff QB Cody Hawkins is going to direct a win tonight, he'll have to make better decisions and not put the Buffs in a hole early.

Now, here's an educated guess.

The Buffs have been pointing to this game since the end of last season. The coaches and players know this is a golden opportunity to move up a notch in the national eye, an opportunity to signal that Colorado football is moving up the ladder.

The Buffs beat Colorado State with a vanilla game plan. They survived Eastern Washington's upset bid - - barely -- with much of the same.

Don't be surprised if Hawk and his crew throw a few wrinkles on the field tonight.



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Bufs enter the mean season tonight

CU starting a nasty stretch of nationally ranked foes

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Colorado's upcoming six-pack of football games is surely stout: heavy on substance and packing a wallop. It's a six-game stretch that may rival any in the SEC. Big games against talented teams, with so much at stake.

Beginning with tonight's nationally televised game against No. 21 West Virginia at Folsom Field, Colorado (2-0) faces a six-week murderer's row that includes five ranked teams. And the only unranked opponent among the six, Kansas State, busted the Buffaloes 47-20 last season.

After West Virginia comes a road game against No. 24 Florida State in Jacksonville, a home game against No. 7 Texas, a trip to No. 19 Kansas, at home against Kansas State and a visit to No. 5 Missouri.

"Yeah, we have a nice

Colorado Football

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little run coming up," CU offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said.

Helfrich declined to elaborate. Coaches and players are conditioned to "take one game at a time." Everybody on a college football team acts like he might jinx something if a future game is addressed, even under his breath.

There was, however, a whole lot of peeking — and dreaming — going on before the season. Linebacker Shaun Mohler said he looked ahead. A junior

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college All-American from California, Mohler acknowledged that the meat of Colorado's 2008 schedule became a major factor in him choosing the Buffs last winter. He also weighed offers from Nebraska, California, Iowa and Kentucky.

"Big-time football, that's what I wanted to play," Mohler said. "All the teams we're going against are really good. It's going to be huge. I can't wait."

This would be the program's second-toughest run ever — only one game shy of the 1994 team that played six ranked teams in seven games. Those Buffs were in the top 10 for that stretch, which ended 6-1 after a 24-7 loss at No. 3 Nebraska.

Although drawing West Virginia and Florida State immediately before tackling the Big 12 may be a bit much for any coach's stomach, Colorado's Dan Hawkins was not frightened by CU's long-standing philosophy of a challenging nonconference schedule.

As Mohler can attest, Colorado's coaching staff sells that to recruits. Hawkins talks frequently about "watershed games" and playing on TV. According to CU, the Buffs ranked third nationally in 2007 with 11 games televised by national or regional networks.

"That's a benefit of being in our program. We want our kids to be excited about that," Hawkins said. "It's great exposure for our football team, for our university, for how we do things and how we look. All that stuff pays dividends."

If the Buffs' upcoming opponents hold the line, CU could play four consecutive ranked teams. The only other time that happened in school history was 1973. That stretch ended 1-3 and knocked the Buffs out of the top 20.

Team captain Ryan Walters tells his teammates to

consider each week an opportunity rather than a challenge.

"We'll be riding high if we can make it through that (six-game stretch)," the senior safety said.

Hawkins believes his team has adopted his mantra of never looking past the upcoming opponent. Considering the Buffs' horrid first half against Eastern Washington, some CU fans might wonder. In any case, Helfrich said it is impossible for the coaching staff to "save something" for later.

Not in this age of parity, anyway. The days of Woody Hayes spending part of each week "working on Michigan stuff" have long passed.

"You never know what the health of guys is going to be for future games," Helfrich explained. "And there are always guys that improve and seem to 'appear' later in the season. There are variables you can't predict."

Sophomore quarterback Cody Hawkins said the team has done a good job of not looking past West Virginia. Players are not getting caught up in the bright lights, he said, even with temporary lighting towers going in just yards from the locker room.

"Nobody is saying, 'It's cool, ESPN is here,' " Cody Hawkins said. "Everybody is just focused on the game."

Tonight figures to be challenge enough. Although West Virginia (1-1) comes off a loss at East Carolina, the Mountaineers are the reigning Fiesta Bowl champions. They turned the 48-28 victory over Oklahoma into a track meet.

"The bottom line is, if we don't take care of this game," CU senior defensive tackle George Hypolite said, "none of those other five games matter."

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Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
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Poll vaulting

No. 21 vs. West Virginia, Today, 6:30 p.m.

Senior quarterback Pat White directs a frenzied spread offense that can make opponents look helpless.

No. 24 at Florida State, Sept. 27, 1:30 p.m.

After struggling offensively in recent years, FSU has found a quarterback in Christian Ponder (six TD passes).

No. 7 vs. Texas, Oct. 4, TBA

That rescheduled game against Arkansas means the Longhorns lose their bye week before conference play starts.

No. 19 at Kansas, Oct. 11, TBA

The loss last week at now- No. 12 South Florida was just the Jayhawks' third in their past 20 games.

Unranked vs. Kansas State, Oct. 18, TBA

The Wildcats had been untested in two wins, but in Wednesday's 38-29 loss at Louisville, they failed their first test.

No. 5 at Missouri, Oct. 25, TBA

Tigers lead the nation in total offense (597.3 yards) and scoring (57.7 points) and are third in passing yards (392.7).

Colorado vs. No. 21 West Virginia

Today, at Boulder, 6:30 p.m., ESPN

COLORADO

Player to watch: RB Darrell Scott. Except for a 22-yard burst in the second quarter, the true freshman tailback struggled to even get to the line of scrimmage against Eastern Washington, netting 17 yards in his other 12 carries. With the return of guard Devin Head and tight end Riar Geer from suspensions, Scott is ready for bigger holes and a breakout game.

Key for the Buffaloes: Speed bumps. Colorado's defense can't allow quarterback Pat White and tailback Noel Devine to get loose. They won't get caught from behind. "We just have to corral their speed," CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "If everyone gets in their gaps and fits right, then we have a chance to corral that. If not, it's going to be a long night."

WEST VIRGINIA

Player to watch: QB Pat White. The quarterback was listed as a Heisman Trophy candidate until the loss at East Carolina. White ranks fourth on the NCAA's all-time QB rushing list (3,666 yards) and has thrown for 4,487 yards. At 6-foot-2 and 197 pounds, he has enough size to break open-field tackles.

Key for the Mountaineers: Williams' return. It would help if preseason all-Big East MLB Reed Williams would finally get on the field tonight. The senior leader missed the first two games because of offseason surgery on both shoulders. Without Williams, WVU has seven new starters on a defense that can't seem to get opponents off the field.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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Stopping West Virginia means stopping White

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

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Colorado faces a tough task tonight trying to contain West Virginia QB Pat White. (Andy Lyons, Getty Images)

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — The West Virginia team Colorado hosts tonight won't be the same team that has become the blueprint of the spread offense, the scourge of the Big East, the pesky program that contends more than pretends in the national title chase.

Seven defensive starters are gone from last year's sixth-ranked team. Tailback Steve Slaton, synonymous with the spread, left early for the Houston Texans. An ugly loss to East Carolina likely leaves the Big East as the only title left for the 21st-ranked Mountaineers (1-1) to chase.

However, the one constant that comes into Folsom Field is West Virginia's biggest strength of all. Senior quarterback Patrick White didn't go anywhere, folks. He's back. With so many Mountaineers gone, stopping White, now more than ever before, means stopping West Virginia.

"He's the greatest winner in college football today," said new West Virginia coach Bill Stewart, White's quarterbacks coach his first two years. "Winning oozes out of him."

White is 27-5 as a starting quarterback. No other quarterback in the country is close. The two-time Big East offensive player of the year is only 623 yards from Brad Smith's NCAA mark of 4,289 rushing yards by a quarterback, set at Missouri from 2002-05.

If the growing obsession with the spread offense could produce a perfect spread quarterback off an assembly line, he'd be Patrick White.

"He can go for a home run at any time," Rutgers coach Greg Schiano said. "He's fast. And he can stop on a dime. He can be going full speed horizontally, stick a foot in the ground and go full speed vertical."

The spread and White were made for each other. That's why he wound up in the Allegheny Mountains from the Mobile, Ala., suburb of Daphne. He was third in Alabama's Mr. Football contest after rushing for 31 touchdowns, passing for 15 more and producing 3,393 yards total offense his senior year at Daphne High School.

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Tennessee wanted him. So did Auburn and Alabama. Two problems: They came in late and wanted him at wide receiver. That didn't bother White a bit. He was not torn by the Auburn-Alabama rivalry.

"My mom went to Alabama State," White said last week. "I grew up watching black college football."

He had some drawbacks. He was thin. However, he was fast, smart and had a strong arm. The Anaheim Angels drafted the pitcher/outfielder in the fourth round after he helped Daphne win two state baseball titles.

Since arriving in Morgantown, he has thrown for 4,487 yards and 40 touchdowns, including five TD passes in the opener against Villanova.

"He's the best quarterback in the country, hands down," guard Greg Isdane said. "You never hear him do anything bad. He threw an interception. That's probably the worst thing he's ever done in his life."

The son of a fire chief and retired teacher, White heard the comment and looked curious.

"On the field, that's definitely a bad thing to do," he said. "I try to be a good person. I'm thankful for the parents that I have and the way they raised me."

As a senior, White has become more vocal. He made headlines in July when he called out West Virginia baseball coach Greg Van Zant for not having enough minority players and then, last week, called out players over the 24-3 loss to East Carolina.

"A few were walking around with their noses up," he said.

It didn't help that ECU dared WVU to run as White was 11-of-18 passing for 72 yards.

"I don't want him to press," Stewart said. "I said, 'Don't you press.' He just smiled and said, 'Coach, I know.' He'll beat you but I don't want him to feel that he has to beat you."

But if you look at his history, the Buffaloes better not let him beat them.

John Henderson: 303-954-1299 or jhenderson@denverpost.com

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Buffaloes out to run it

To be effective, young line, backs need to coalesce

By B.G. Brooks

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

When you're pushing 6-foot-8, the tendency is to aim high.

Here's the target right tackle Ryan Miller has for the Colorado running game: "The only goal I really want for my running backs is for them to be Heisman Trophy candidates. And that's on us (the offensive line). Our backs are definitely of that caliber."

Lofty ambition, but land a Buffaloes tailback in the

Heisman race and Miller figures the ground- game numbers will shout for themselves. So far, though, those figures haven't.

Through two games, CU is averaging 121.5 yards rushing a game, or 3.5 per carry. When coach Dan Hawkins surveys the offensive explosion in the Big 12 Conference, those stats simply don't stack up.

"I was telling coach (Mark) Helfrich (offensive coordinator) . . . the leading offense in the Big 12 is 150 yards more than it was two years ago," Hawkins said. "There's some shocking numbers. You look at the offensive production, and it's way up.

"Is (CU's) where I thought it would be? We want to be among the best, so I don't think it's where we want it to be (and) I think our rushing numbers are a little behind where we want them to be."

So, entering the game tonight at Folsom Field against No. 21 West Virginia (6:30, ESPN), finding their legs is the Buffs' offensive priority - and Hawkins, Helfrich and running game coordinator/offensive line coach Jeff Grimes have no doubt their unit is in the right scheme to do it.

They believe CU's spring move to an up-tempo, spread offense - it's primarily run from a shotgun formation - will begin paying running game dividends as soon as a young offensive line and equally young running backs coalesce.

"It's important to be cohesive; there's a lot of double teams in our scheme," sophomore left tackle Nate Solder said. "If you're stepping on someone's feet, you're not going to get the right block. It's coming together. Some of the guys who didn't have as much confidence are building that confidence."

There is no downside to the scheme, Helfrich said. "Whether it's Oregon with Jonathan Stewart or others, there've been plenty of (teams) that have taken shotgun snaps and run the ball well and productively. That (shotgun) certainly hasn't been our issue thus far. We just have to improve on some

things. I don't think where the snap has been taken has had an effect."

Helfrich said inexperience has given the offense's younger players the tendency to "not quite trust everything they see" from their teammates. "Then you have some weird things happen in the last game that affects their confidence."

That, he believes, will disappear with game experience.

Among the young players

grappling with the learning curve is freshman tailback Darrell Scott, who, with 93 yards in two games (3.9 yards a carry) is CU's leading rusher. Scott has shown glimpses of the ability that made him the nation's top tailback prospect in the 2008 recruiting cycle, but he concedes he's still learning fundamental pass protection and adjusting to the speed of the college game.

Then there's the matter of all the other fresh faces liberally sprinkled on CU's offense and getting them in the same book, much less on the same page.

"We've got to get in sync," Scott said. "But we're coming along - I think we're ready. I'm really comfortable and getting used to the speed of the game, but I know the West Virginia game is going to be a lot faster, and I'll have to adjust to that."

Hawkins said Scott has been allowed to evolve at a comfortable pace: "We haven't pushed Darrell at all. Let him evolve naturally. We know there's going to be some growing pains there.

"Eventually, when we get all five, six, seven guys on the same page, it's going to be electric, I know that. (But) I'm not very patient. Neither is coach Grimes or coach Helfrich."

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National TV games still a big deal for CU football

By B.G. Brooks

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

The Buffaloes played in 11 televised games last season, so performing in front of the cameras is . . . yes, still a big deal.

Nationally televised games, coach **Dan Hawkins** said, "pay big dividends. To have the university on a national stage is great. It's great exposure for our football team, for our university, for how we do things, how we look, all that stuff."

Added freshman tailback **Darrell Scott**: "I've just been sitting down watching all these teams playing on ESPN, and now it's our chance to shine. So we better not disappoint."

CU expects a handful of prospects to make official recruiting visits tonight.

Step it up

In planning for West Virginia, which lines up defensively in an unconventional 3-3-5 scheme that brings pressure from various positions, CU's coaches have challenged the offense to focus on fundamentals and quicken the pace even more. They're hoping to run more plays and use the altitude to their advantage.

Left tackle **Nate Solder** said preparation for West Virginia's "stack" defense has "been a little different . . . but I'm excited about what we can do (with the running game). With the backs we have, with the guys in the line, it can be unbelievable."

Offensive coordinator **Mark Helfrich** said CU's offensive linemen "have done a nice job in the last week and a half of accepting some challenges laid before them . . . same thing for the tailbacks, too."

Black is back

CU students want the student body and Buffs fans to wear black tonight, and quarterback **Cody Hawkins** is taking the "blackout" a step further. He showed up at the Dal Ward Athletic Center on Tuesday with his hair dyed jet black, saying later he'll cut the dye job short.

He said it

"I don't like the word *swagger*. Maybe we can get our moxie back - or whatever you call it, where we can fly around a little bit . . . run to the ball, swarm to the ball."

West Virginia coach **Bill Stewart**, whose team is coming off a 24-3 loss to East Carolina.

Numbers game

46 consecutive national polls have included West Virginia, which climbed to No. 21 this week (The Associated Press) despite having a bye week. The Mountaineers dropped from No. 8 to No. 25 after losing to East Carolina.

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There are subplots aplenty tonight

Bufs bracing for full dose of West Virginia ground game

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Bill Stewart smells a challenge.

The West Virginia coach perused Colorado's statistics and saw one that appeared formidable: CU hasn't allowed a visitor to rush for more than 100 yards since Kansas State's Alan Webb went for 103 in 2004.

"I didn't know that," Stewart said. "That gets me excited, and I hope it gets our guys excited."

When No. 21 West Virginia visits CU tonight, whether the Mountaineers can run on CU's defense is one of many subplots:

Has CU's offensive line fixed its problems? How will the Buffs' secondary cope against West Virginia's speed? Is CU's 1-7 mark against ranked teams under coach Dan Hawkins indicative of where this program is?

And are those rumors about CU donning black helmets as part of the school's "Blackout" efforts true?

Hawkins didn't confirm them when asked Tuesday. He didn't deny them, either.

But stopping the run — CU's first defensive task in every game — should get a stiff test tonight from an opponent that's talking like it's going to return to its offensive strength.

West Virginia (1-1) has averaged 54 offensive plays in its two games and knows it needs more.

Stewart said speedy tailback Noel Devine needs more touches. Devine had 27 plays that went for 20 yards or more in 2007.

Pat White needs five yards to move into third place on the NCAA's career rushing list for quarterbacks.

CU is bracing for an attack like the one West Virginia used in the 2008 Fiesta Bowl, when it ran 39 times for 349 yards on Oklahoma.

"We have to play fast," CU linebacker Jeff Smart said. "We have to get 11 guys running to the ball all the time because they do have the thread of breaking any play for a long gain."

Said CU safety Ryan Walters: "They have some tremendous guys that are very talented athletes. You just have to keep everything in front of us, make sure tackles and play smart football."

Since the start of 2005, CU has allowed six 100-yard rushers in 39 games.

Those who have reached the century mark usually have required several carries to do so. In 2007, Colorado State's Kyle Bell (135 yards on 40 carries) and Iowa State's Alexander Robinson had 127 on 29. Kansas State's James Johnson ran for 159 on 20 tries, but had late runs of 68 and 40 yards.

While the Buffs have insisted this is not a statement game, it is on national television, and the buzz around the program suggests they believe it's big.

Five of CU's next six opponents are ranked, including West Virginia, so whatever happens tonight should give an idea of what awaits the Buffs.

"This is big time," defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "The lights are on, Thursday night, the whole country will be watching and we got some young guys, and it's time for us to prove ourselves, to see what kind of team we really are.

"Outside of that, I'm not really thinking too far ahead because West Virginia is the kind of team you can't look past."

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

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Stats a bit misleading

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

Could it be Big 12 offenses are even better than expected?

That might be the case, though check back in early November, when we're well into conference play.

For now, they're racking up big numbers against the likes of Nevada and Missouri State. But entering the season's fourth weekend, they're big numbers, nevertheless.

Four Big 12 teams are among the nation's top 10 in total offense, led by Missouri's 597.33 yards per game, and five rank in the top 10 in scoring. Missouri is averaging 57.67 points per game.

Coaches can't help but notice.

"It's really interesting; the leading offense in the Big 12 is 150 yards more than what the leading offense in the conference was two years ago," CU's Dan Hawkins said. "Some of the numbers are shocking."

In 2006, Texas Tech led the league with 448.8 yards per game, and Texas was the top scorer with 35.9 per outing.

Quarterback play has become the league's trademark. The Big 12 features six of the nation's top 13 quarterbacks in the all-important passing efficiency statistic.

Six QBs are completing better than 70 percent of their throws.

"This is somewhat unusual in that we have this many (quarterbacks) at once in this league that are very good," Oklahoma State's Mike Gundy said. "At the end of last year, we had five guys that could've been named all-Big 12 quarterback, and no one would have said anything."

"Offense have taken the next step. It's the fast-break style of offenses that run up numbers and move the football fast and efficiently. The quarterback is going to get the credit, whether that's good or bad."

The strangest number, or maybe the most shocking, might be coming out of Kansas, where Kerry Meier is tied for the nation's lead in receptions per game with 9.67.

Jayhawks' coach Mark Mangino said Meier still spends 50 percent of his time working as the team's back-up quarterback. Meier does not attend wide receiver meetings unless the quarterbacks and receivers are meeting together.

"That's the amazing part," Mangino said.

While the league's offensive production is worth talking about, it's not yet worth getting too excited over. The chances of Missouri scoring 57 points and going for 597 yards at Texas on Oct. 18 are minimal.

We know non-conference opponents aren't used to seeing so many teams with so much quarterback experience that are so proficient at the spread. What we don't know is how well Big 12 defenses have prepared.

We'll see.

Around the Big 12

Starting with Wednesday's Kansas State-Louisville game, Big 12 teams face Big East programs on three consecutive nights, and the games are being nationally televised. Following tonight's CU-West Virginia game, Baylor visits Connecticut on Friday.

The rest of the weekend features several mismatches, including Buffalo at Missouri, Sam Houston State at Kansas, and Massachusetts at Texas Tech.

At one time Miami at Texas A&M had some appeal. That was a long time ago.

The nation will get to see Baylor freshman quarterback Robert Griffin on Friday. Griffin is instilling hope in a program that's struggled since the Big 12 started.

He ran for a school-record 217 yards on 11 carries against Washington State last Friday. The win, 45-17, was Baylor first against a non-conference BCS team since 1998.

"Robert Griffin makes everybody else look slow," Washington State coach Paul Wulff told reporters.

One thing to remember — Washington State flew in the morning it played after Hurricane Ike forced Baylor officials to move kickoff up from Saturday to Friday night. The rebuilding Cougars looked jet-lagged.

When Missouri hosts Buffalo, it'll also host Buffalo coach and former Nebraska quarterback Turner Gill. What Gill will see Saturday in Columbia will be much different than his time at Nebraska, where he went 28-2 as a starter from 1981-83.

Kansas' run problems continue. The Jayhawks are 105th in the nation with 105 rushing yards a game. Kansas ran for 61 yards in its loss last week at South Florida. Mangino said receivers are not blocking well enough, and if they don't do better, they'll be benched.

Pictures of the submerged field at Lubbock's Jones AT&T Stadium made their way around the Internet last week, making you wonder how Texas Tech ever got its game with SMU played.

Red Raiders coach Mike Leach said the water was two feet deep in the middle of the field, 31/2 on the sides, after a "Noah's Ark-type" of storm started falling Thursday evening. It dropped 7.8 inches of rain, and overwhelmed the field's pump. Lubbock firefighters drained about 300,000 gallons of water before kickoff Saturday.

"That was really unbelievable," Leach said.

Patrick Ridgell's Big 12 notes column runs every Thursday during the regular season. He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.