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CU's D needs to get a grip

Missed tackles costly for Buffs

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Tackling is a part of Colorado's daily football practice, and coaches emphasize it in myriad ways throughout the year.

Yet the Buffaloes have had some problems putting opposing ball carriers on the ground the past two weeks.

Why?

That question is not easily answered, and the quality of CU's past two opponents has something to do with it. As the Buffs enter today's game at No. 16 Kansas and face another version of the spread offense with a scrambling quarterback who's plenty elusive, they just know they'd better improve.

"We tackle well, but we have to tackle better," senior linebacker Brad Jones said. "I think we've made some mistakes in tackling (by) really just not focusing on it. ... I don't know what's been going on lately. Sometimes it seems like people aren't finishing or doing the stuff we know how to do."

The missed tackles aren't abundant; they just seem to be very costly. One example last week in the first quarter against Texas occurred when CU defenders had their hands on a Longhorns running back. He escaped, turning second-and-17 into a 23-yard gain and a first down. Texas scored its second touchdown two plays later. The rout was on.

Last year, Kansas quarterback Todd Reesing turned a modest gain into a 53-yard scramble when he side-stepped a CU defender and sprinted down the field. The play set up a field goal.

"When you miss a tackle, it's usually 5 or 6 extra yards," CU defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "There have been some instances where we've had opportunities to make tackles and make plays and we didn't do it. In the kind of defense we play, we're predicated on making one-on-one tackles, so it's hurt us in these past couple games."

Improvement could come from better focus, as Jones suggested. Whether it comes from added emphasis in practice is difficult to see. CU coach Dan Hawkins said there are tradeoffs in terms of how much you can tackle live and the injury risk a coach assumes.

Given CU's recent injuries, that risk looms large.

"We do tackling drills just for form," Jones said. "But at the same time ... it's Division I football; you can't be tackling people to the ground in every practice, or someone is going to get hurt."

Kansas ranks last in the Big 12 in rushing, averaging 118.6 yards a game on the ground, 2 yards fewer than CU. The Jayhawks rediscovered running back Jake Sharp in last week's win at Iowa State. Sharp had 186 all-purpose yards.

Junior Kerry Meier is second in the nation in receptions per game (8.8) and 11th in receiving yards (102.8). Reesing is second in the Big 12 in passing yards at 344.8 a game, but he has hurt the Buffs on the ground the past two years. He hasn't had that much success, though.

CU held Kansas to 19 points in last year's loss at Folsom Field. Only one other team held the Jayhawks to so few points, and that was Texas A&M a week later. Reesing knows.

"Obviously, they did something last year that gave us a lot of problems," he said. "I would assume they would want to take a similar approach, because we struggled moving the ball at times, and our passing game was rather ineffective last year."

For CU, it's a similar challenge.

"It's another special quarterback who can do a lot of special things," Hypolite said. "We have to tackle him, get him to the ground. We have to pressure him, and maybe he'll throw us a few.

"I think our coaches have done a good job about emphasizing (tackling) this week in practice. ... So hopefully, we can fix it."

Justin Williams contributed to this story. Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

Rocky Mountain News

Bufs try to pull it together, bust skid

Hawkins: Talk is constructive; team 'not cashing it in'

By **B.G. Brooks**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

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Photo by Doug Pensinger © Getty

Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins is sacked by Texas' Ryan Palmer during the Buffs 38-14 loss to the Longhorns last Saturday. CU has lost two games in a row after starting the season 3-0. Up this weekend is a matchup with No. 16 Kansas.

In the wake of a two-game losing streak, what's a college football coach to do?

Here's what he doesn't do, according to the University of Colorado's Dan Hawkins: "We haven't brought out the bamboo and started beating them across the back with it."

Rather than cruel and unusual punishment,

Hawkins and his staff have meted out basic instruction aimed at basic improvement.

Areas of emphasis: quarterback play, placekicking, pass protection, containing the quarterback, tackling.

Obviously, the laundry list is lengthy, but Hawkins says of his players, "They're trying, working, not cashing it in . . . we're just trying to pull it together."

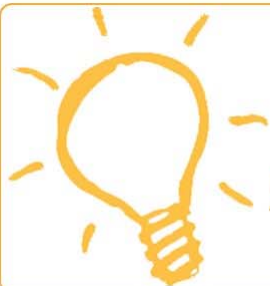
How close the Buffaloes have come to doing that will be determined today at No. 16 Kansas, a Big 12 Conference team CU grew accustomed to dominating - the Buffs won five consecutive games in the series from 2001-05 - before the unveiling of diminutive quarterback Todd Reesing.

Largely because of the 5-foot- 11, 200-pound junior, the Jayhawks own a two-game winning streak against the Buffs. In 2006, Reesing's redshirt came off in the ninth week of the season and KU benefited immediately in its 20-15 comeback victory against CU.

The Jayhawks won 19-14 last season, and once again, Reesing was a major player.

"He's just got unbelievable feet," CU secondary coach Greg Brown said. "And for not being the biggest guy, he's really got a strong arm. Plus, he throws so well from either side when they roll him out. You've got to have 'eyes on' on every play."

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Rocky Mountain News

In a different context, CU's quarterbacks also bear watching. Starter Cody Hawkins is coming off back-to-back subpar games, with defensive pressure applied by Florida State and Texas undoubtedly a factor.

Still, Hawkins' most recent two-game stats show him 30- for-69 passing for 272 yards and three touchdowns (one interception).

His total of 13 completions against the Longhorns (33 attempts) was one more than a career-low 12 in a 55-10 loss to Missouri last season, and the quarterback is last in the league in passing efficiency (120.0 to 205.0 by Oklahoma's Sam Bradford).

Dan Hawkins said earlier this week that giving redshirt freshman backup Matt Ballenger meaningful early playing time today is a possibility. Cody Hawkins calls Ballenger, who got his first college action last week, against Texas, "a great quarterback, no matter who he's playing or when.

"But if you can get in the first half and get some reps, whoever you are, that game experience is very valuable. In the first or second quarter of games, people are still kind of throwing the kitchen sink at you, depending on what the game plan is. You see a lot of different stuff. . . . "

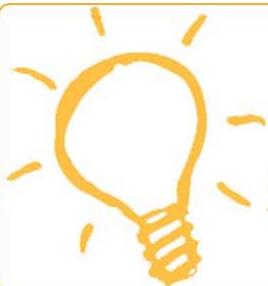
In addition to running twice for 8 yards, Ballenger completed 3-of-4 passes for 61 yards and a touchdown against Texas.

But he entered the game in the fourth quarter

with CU trailing 38-7 - not a real gauge of his abilities against a top-tier defense.

"Cody's our starter, but I prepare every week like I'm going to start," Ballenger said. "It's no different than the first week of the season, or last week."

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Rocky Mountain News

CU report: Lessons learned?

By **B.G. Brooks**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published October 10, 2008 at 8:10 p.m.

BOULDER — After losing 19-14 to Kansas last season, the Buffaloes quietly filed the result under "ones that got away."

Other 2007 regular-season losses that occupied the same file included Florida State (16-6) and Iowa State (31-28).

In their trip two weekends ago to Jacksonville, Fla., the Buffs didn't come close to atoning for the Florida State loss. Their chance against KU comes today, but CU quarterback **Cody Hawkins** claims he and his teammates aren't "worried about payback."

"Nobody's letting their emotions get the best of them," Hawkins said. "No matter what happened last year or on the last play, you've got to go out and take care of your job."

The Jayhawks, meanwhile, are mindful of being held to their lowest point total of the season by the Buffs. KU entered that game averaging 50.2 points in the first six weeks of the 2007 season.

"That is enough said right there," KU quarterback **Todd Reesing** said. "So, obviously, they did something last year that gave us a lot of problems. I would assume they would want to

take a similar approach."

Lovin' the Buffs

Reesing has turned in his two career- best rushing performances against CU (90 yards in 2006, 84 in 2007). But he's not the only Jayhawks player who stretched his legs against the Buffs.

In 1998, **David Winbush** gouged CU for 268 yards - the fourth-highest single rushing performance in KU history. And in 2001 in Boulder, Jayhawks kicker **Johnny Beck** hit a 59-yard field goal - the second- longest in KU history.

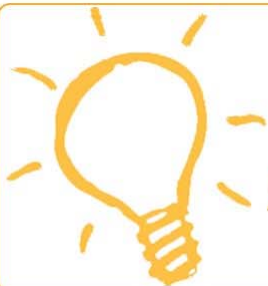
Air time?

The Jayhawks' lowest ranking in the Big 12 Conference team defensive statistics is in pass defense (No. 7, allowing 227.6 yards a game).

Can the Buffs exploit that?

"I don't know that we've really done anything consistently on offense," CU coach **Dan Hawkins** said, obviously aware his passing game ranks 10th in the conference, at 205.0 yards a game.

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Young Buffs face pivotal test at KU

No. 16 Jayhawks have won two straight over Hawkins' Buffs

By Kyle Ringo
Saturday, October 11, 2008

LAWRENCE, Kan. -- Watershed or woodshed?

It's tough to get an accurate read on this Colorado football team. The young Buffs have shown tantalizing flashes of ability in the first five games this season only to be followed up by youthful blunders, blown assignments and costly injuries.

All of it has led them to a 3-2 record coming into today's game at No. 16 Kansas.

The sixth game of the season could be pivotal in deciding which way this team goes this fall.

If the Buffs can take care of the ball, coax a solid performance from a makeshift offensive line and limit big plays from Kansas quarterback Todd Reesing, they could earn a watershed win that propels them toward a bowl game.

If they fall short in any one of those areas or all three, this could be one of those beatings, CU coach Dan Hawkins refers to as being taken to the woodshed.

"They're a really good team and doing good," Hawkins said. "So we have to play well or we're not going to have a chance."

Hawkins hasn't beaten Kansas coach Mark Mangino in his first two tries at CU and is just 2-8 against the five rivals in the Big 12 North. Kansas has won the last two meetings by five points. The Jayhawks are favored by 14 today.

Kansas is in the midst of what might be the most remarkable run in the modern era of its football program.

The good times for the Jayhawks began two years ago against the Buffs when quarterback Todd Reesing came off the bench in the second half to lead the Jayhawks to a come-from-behind win.

It was the first action of Reesing's career, and he has become one of the better quarterbacks in the college game since.

Kansas had lost four in a row prior to beating the Buffs that day. The Jayhawks have gone 19-3 since, including a 12-game home-field winning streak at Memorial Stadium and a close win over CU at Folsom Field last season.

Reesing has been a Buff killer, using scrambling ability to get out of trouble and make plays on the run. Reesing is a crafty quarterback when it comes to improvisation.

The best two rushing games of his career -- 84 and 90 yards -- have come against the Buffs, with most of that yardage earned on plays where he scrambled out of trouble.

The Jayhawks have won this season by throwing the ball and come into today's contest ranked sixth nationally in passing. Reesing led his team to another come-from-behind win last week on the road at Iowa State. The Jayhawks fell behind 20-0 and rallied to win.

"On the positive side, we were able to fight back from a 20-point deficit and that shows a lot about our team and the makeup we have," Reesing said. "Any time you can fight back on the road and overcome something like that in one half is pretty unbelievable."

The Buffs are coming off back-to-back losses to Texas and Florida State and have struggled to move the ball with any consistency. Much of those struggles are rooted in an offensive line that features four players who had little or no playing time under their belts when the season started.

Colorado is getting spotty play at guard to the point that coaches moved redshirt freshman defensive tackle Eugene Goree to the position this week with the idea of throwing him into the fire today.

Coaches believe Goree has the tenacity and strength that has been lacking at the position and he could develop into a solid contributor there.

One way or another, the Buffs have to manufacture more running room for their tailbacks and more time for quarterback Cody Hawkins to find open receivers in the passing game.

Hawkins has taken a beating in the past two weeks, and though he won't say he is hurt, coaches have said they would consider giving redshirt freshman Matt Ballenger some meaningful snaps in case a backup is needed this season.

But fans shouldn't count on seeing Ballenger today with coach Dan Hawkins being a big believer in sticking with one quarterback until it is clear a change must be made. Coaches do not believe that time has come for Cody Hawkins, who has been operating this season behind a young and makeshift offensive line.

Cody Hawkins has completed just 30 of 69 passes for 272 yards the past two weeks. He has thrown four touchdown passes with only one interception in that span while being sacked six times.

Hawkins said he has his work cut out once again today.

"They really execute their assignments very well," Hawkins said. "I think that's a defense where you really have to take what they give you. You can't really impose your will on them like you'd like to.

"They are a defense that does a great job of mixing it up, and you've got to take what they're giving you. ... That's the key to success against them."



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Woelk: KU game a crossroads for Buffaloes

By Neill Woelk

Saturday, October 11, 2008

Break down any college football team's schedule and you'll find a couple of games that go a long way in defining a season.

Dan Hawkins' Colorado Buffaloes have one of those today.

This is a game the Buffs aren't supposed to win (they are 14-point underdogs), but one they believe is well within their reach. A loss would by no means ruin the season (3-3 at the halfway point), but a win would be a huge boost.

More than anything, however, a win today against No. 16 Kansas would signal that Colorado is moving closer to becoming a serious player in the Big 12 again.

In today's topsy-turvy college football landscape (Vanderbilt is unbeaten and ranked; Nebraska is simplyrank), those steps forward do not come easily. When your team is young, inexperienced and trying to fill injury-riddled spots on a weekly basis, such advances are even more difficult.

But no one will give the Buffs sympathy points in Lawrence.

Colorado needs a strong, consistent effort today. The Buffs haven't put together a solid overall game since an overtime win over West Virginia -- and even then, the offense by no means resembled a well-oiled machine.

Simply, it's time for the Buffs to prove they are getting better.

A friend of mine who pays close attention to such things recently happened upon a replay of last year's Oklahoma-Colorado matchup while surfing the tube. He noted that in the second half of that game, CU's offense ran more smoothly than it has at any time this year.

That's not how it's supposed to work. Colorado's offense should be getting consistently better, not treading water or going backward.

No doubt, Colorado had a more experienced offensive line a year ago, and one that was healthy. But six games into this season, it's not unreasonable to expect an offense to operate efficiently.

We know that Hawk and offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich are constantly tinkering, adding new wrinkles that will someday -- hopefully -- give the Buffs a versatile, hard-to-defend attack. They shouldn't shortchange the long-term plan, particularly with an ever-growing quiver of offensive weapons. The more they incorporate those weapons, the better off they'll be.

But there also comes a time when simplifying the attack for the sake of being competitive is a sensible approach.

Today's game could very well be one of those crossroads affairs that people will remember long after the season is over. The Kansas game certainly filled the bill in that regard a year ago.

When the Jayhawks came to Boulder in 2007, the Buffs were 4-3, with wins in three of their four previous games. Colorado let a golden opportunity for a win slip away, and the KU game became Colorado's second loss in a 1-4 stretch that almost eliminated the Buffs from bowl contention.

Certainly, the loss haunted CU's players and staff the entire offseason. It proved to be one of those game that could have turned a decent season into a very good one.

Today's game meets the same criteria.

Not many folks expected Colorado to be any better than 3-3 at the midway point. But while a 3-0 start changed those expectations, an 0-3 stretch to follow that up would certainly negate all the momentum of that quick start.

It would be back to square one.

One of Hawkins' favorite points of emphasis is that of progress. Victories, he says, are simply a by-product of steady improvement.

There's been no steady improvement this year. Progress has come in fits and starts.

Today, Colorado's offense needs to take that step. No more mistakes from players lining up in the wrong place. Consistency must become part of the equation instead of the missing link.

Meanwhile, CU's defense needs to continue to do what it's done this far: play well enough to keep the Buffs in the game. Any slipup in that department, and the Buffs could see this one get away in a hurry.

No doubt, CU's patchwork offensive line makes the goal of consistency exponentially more difficult.

But if the Buffs are indeed going to take the correct turn at today's crossroads, they need to overcome those obstacles and move forward.

After all, nobody said it was going to be easy.



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