



Buff offense under gun at A&M

Colorado aims to move one game closer to bowl eligibility

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, November 1, 2008

COLLEGE STATION, Texas --- Nearly three months have passed since the Colorado football team opened training camp, and the offense is still sputtering, still making silly mistakes, still struggling with the fundamentals of everyone knowing what to do on a given play.

Coaches have worked through injuries. They have simplified for a group of predominantly freshmen and sophomores. Coaches have tweaked, added a true freshman quarterback and simplified some more. None of it has lead to more consistency and tangible improvement.

If all else fails, threaten them.

Last Sunday afternoon, when the Buffs came together for their weekly running session with strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman following a 58-0 loss at Missouri, Pitman provided this uncomfortable thought for everyone not in the senior class.

"He told us, 'If you guys don't make a bowl game, you get an extra month with me,'" quarterback Tyler Hansen quoted Pitman as saying.

The Buffs hope to rebound from their first shutout in 20 years today in one of the most difficult venues in the nation at 83,000-seat Kyle Field against Texas A&M. Bowl eligibility is a concern at the backs of their minds, but simply providing a strong effort throughout and making progress offensively is at the forefront for a team that has been outscored 139-41 so far in Big 12 Conference play.

CU is 4-4 overall and requires two more victories in the final four games to become bowl eligible for the second consecutive season. This young team could benefit greatly from the extra practice time in December that a bowl trip would provide.

Today it faces an Aggies team with a dazzling playmaker at quarterback in Jerrod Johnson. The sophomore came off the bench earlier this season in the wake of an injury to senior Stephen McGee and has been just the boost the Aggies need.

Coach Mike Sherman's team is suddenly throwing the ball all around the yard like every other Big 12 team except the Buffs, with Johnson already setting single-game records and averaging 325 passing yards a game. The Aggies have put up more than 400 yards total offense in three of their past four games and are coming off a 49-point outburst on the road at Iowa State last week.

"I think we have to come in there with the right mindset of not doing this as a do-or-die situation," linebacker Jeff Smart said. "We have a great opportunity. They're a great team. It's a tough location and we've struggled on the road.

So it's a great challenge, just like every week is."

The Buffs are looking for their first road win this season and only their third in nearly three full seasons under coach Dan Hawkins. CU is 2-10 on the road since the start of the 2006 season.

The focus today will fall on who wins the battle between, possibly, the two most beleaguered units in the Big 12 Conference --- the CU offense and the Texas A&M defense.

This could be the best opportunity to this point this season for the Buffs to build some confidence moving the ball. If they are unable to do so against a defense that has surrendered 450 yards or more of total offense in each of the past three weeks, it could be even more deflating.

The Aggies (3-5, 1-3) rank near the bottom of 119 teams in the Bowl Championship Subdivision in defense. They are giving up an astounding 45 points a game so far on conference play.

"I think sometimes we get a little flustered when things go askew and we don't respond sometimes as well as we should on the next play," Sherman said.

Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich promised changes for his offense this week, but hasn't been specific about the nature of those changes other than saying some personnel will be affected and things will be simplified even further.

There could be adjustments to who sees the bulk of the playing time on the offensive line, but coaches intend to continue to use both Hansen and sophomore Cody Hawkins at quarterback for the third week in a row.

If it all comes together and the Buffs can steal a victory, they will face a significantly less daunting task in the final three games, the next two of which are at home. Another dud today could lead to an even larger explosion of negativity from followers of the program than what has occurred in the past week.



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Woelk: Young Buffs need sense of urgency

In more ways than one, this Colorado football season has been quite similar to the 2007 campaign.

Last year, the Buffs put together a three-game winning streak before proceeding to lose four of their next five. It put them in a virtual must-win situation down the stretch to become bowl eligible, which they did -- just barely.

Sound familiar?

It should. The circumstances this year are slightly different -- the Buffs actually have four games left and must win a pair to become bowl eligible -- but the bottom line is the same.

If they're going to get it done, they'd better start today.

It's been an interesting ride with these young Buffs. At the beginning of the season, a majority of folks predicted that the Buffs would be better, but their record might not reflect it.

Nobody, however, foresaw a team that would struggle so mightily on offense, and one that would play better on defense than most expected (well, aside from last week's 58-0 calamity in Columbia).

Thus, half the prediction appears to be coming true -- the Buffs' record could end up no better or even worse than last year.

As for the other half -- certainly CU's offense has not improved. After an encouraging start in the opener against Colorado State, the Buffs have made little progress. Injuries, poor play at key positions and difficulty adapting to the spread offense have arrested the Buffs' development.

But nine weeks into the season, it's not unreasonable to expect a step forward -- at least, not if the Buffs have one in them.

While we may not see Tyler Hansen starting at quarterback today, we'll likely see quite a bit of the true freshman before the game is over. If you're a believer in history repeating itself, that's actually a good sign for CU. The last time Colorado won in College Station came in 2000, when true freshman Craig Ochs led the Buffs to a 26-19 win over the Aggies.

Quarterback play, though, isn't the only place the Buffs have to see progress if they're going to turn this season back in the right direction.

CU's offensive line has struggled mightily, partly due to injuries and partly to inexperience. As a result, the running game has sputtered. Meanwhile, CU's wide receiver corps has been far less productive than coaches had hoped, and the tight end position has been almost invisible in the receiving category.

There is, however, a silver lining in this cloud: if the Buffs are going to heal themselves offensively, A&M is a good place to start.

The Aggies' defense has been porous. A&M has given up 44.5 points in four conference games, and last week yielded 574 yards and 35 points to Iowa State. It's not unreasonable to expect Colorado to at least match ISU's performance.

Defensively, the Buffs face another difficult task -- but then, that's been the case all season long. A high-powered offense with a good quarterback at the helm. Today, it's the Aggies' Jerrod Johnson.

Colorado has played well at times against good quarterbacks. Just two weeks ago, CU held K-State's Josh Freeman to a 13-point day, the lowest output this year by the Wildcats. If the Buffs can put together an effort to match the one they produced against KSU, they'll be in the game.

But offense and defense aren't the heart of the story today (and neither are special teams, for that matter).

What will go a long way in deciding today's game against a team with similar talent will be CU's attitude.

The Buffs must play with a sense of urgency.

Yes, the Buffs are young. Yep, they've absorbed more than the "normal" number of injuries. But this is the time of year when inexperience and injuries are a nice way of saying wait until next year.

A week ago, Colorado's coaches lined up to take the blame for the lopsided loss in Missouri. CU's staff has been very careful to protect its players, to shield the team -- especially the younger players -- from public criticism.

But today would be a very good time for these young Buffs to grow up. Today would be a good time for the Buffs to take aim at making progress, at playing well and simply.

Most of all, the Buffs need to play as if their season is on the line.

It would be hard to argue otherwise.



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Rocky Mountain News

Bufs in search of punch on offense

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

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Photo by Doug Pensinger / Getty Images

Doug Pensinger / Getty Images

Coach Dan Hawkins promises a "wrinkle or two" in Saturday's game.

Get pounded 58-0 and the foundation shudders.

Doesn't it? Yea and nay.

The Colorado Buffaloes, victimized by that score last weekend at now-No. 14 Missouri, spent the early part of this week trying to convince themselves they really aren't that bad, and the latter part promising themselves they'll prove it today at Texas A&M.

Third-year coach Dan Hawkins, he of the perpetually even keel, waxed philosophical (did

you expect him to wax anything else?) about the severe beat-down and what his team might have gleaned from a night of cruel and unusual punishment.

"There's an old saying out there that, 'We must fight not in the hope of winning, but keeping something alive,' " he said. "That's it. Can you live by your principles, hang in there, and maybe though things aren't going your way, can you stick to your foundation and see it through the fire?"

"If you do that, the tangible things should show up. That's probably the most important thing."

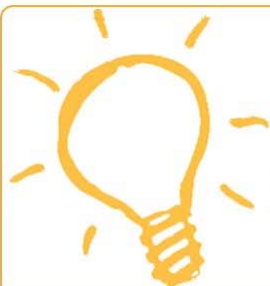
All well and good, but in the immediate future, foremost among the tangibles the Buffs desperately need are a running game and a passing game. In a word - offense.

Discover it, use it and cope with those kissing and swaying crazies that make Aggieland's Kyle Field one of college football's loudest, weirdest and most inhospitable road venues, and returning with a win is not that far-fetched. (Hawkins' Big 12 Conference road record in two-plus seasons is 2-8.)

Texas A&M, still getting to know first-year coach Mike Sherman, is last in the league in rushing defense (203.0 yards allowed a game) and No. 11 in total defense (431.5).

Offsetting those stats, though, are these: CU is last in three of the four major offensive categories and No. 11 in the other (rushing, 122.1

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yards a game). The Buffs have been able to generate only 301.6 total yards and 18.6 points per outing.

So call the statistical war a wash - on paper.

But without divulging any secrets, Hawkins has promised "a wrinkle or two" will be added to this week's game plan. It could be running more out of the I-formation, it could be returning to the use of more skill position "groupings" - a 2006-07 practice largely curtailed this season when CU adopted the no-huddle offense.

"Wait and see," said sophomore quarterback Cody Hawkins, who figures to again share time with freshman Tyler Hansen.

Defensively, the Buffs must contain Aggies sophomore quarterback Jerrod Johnson, who is averaging 315.2 yards passing (11 touchdowns, three interceptions) in his five starts.

"The past couple of games, their offense has really gotten rolling," CU defensive tackle Brandon Nicolas said. "He's completing passes, running around . . . and they're putting up a lot of points."

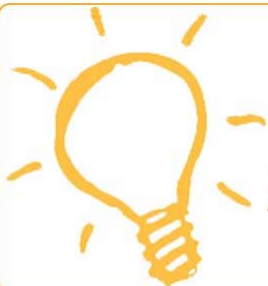
Nicolas' linemate and fellow senior, George Hypolite, contends that surrendering 58 points last weekend didn't shatter CU's confidence.

"I'd say if we were a young defense and had a lot of guys who hadn't played before, we'd probably get down," Hypolite said. "But we're older guys, mostly, and have been through the wars. We've

seen a lot - especially my group of seniors - and we've played through a lot.

"Hey, it can't get any worse than 70-3 (the score of the 2005 Big 12 championship game against Texas). You know, the sun came out on Sunday and we have another chance to play a quality Big 12 opponent. You can't worry about that."

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Rocky Mountain News

CU report: November to remember?

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

Published October 31, 2008 at 8:40 p.m.

BOULDER — Senior defensive tackle **George Hypolite** is among a small group of geezers (relatively speaking) on a young Buffaloes team.

He knows about the importance of November games, mainly because it was underscored by his first CU coach, **Gary Barnett**, who outlined games in the final month of the regular season in gold.

"Those are the ones you've got to win; it's when conference championships are won," Hypolite said. "I've seen crazy things happen (in November) - teams getting into a Big 12 championship game at 5-3 (record) or worse than that in the North. You never know what's going to happen."

Hypolite isn't predicting a late divisional championship run. But he believes a strong finish will propel CU into the postseason.

"The biggest thing is, we've got to start controlling what we can control - and that's playing as well as we can and trying to win these four games," he said. The game today at Texas A&M "is significant because we just got beat 58-0 (by Missouri). So I don't care what race you're in or not in, you've got to go get this one," he said.

Tuesday the key?

Using the Tuesday practice before the Missouri trip as an indicator, some defensive players had an ominous feeling about the game last weekend.

"We didn't feel like our Tuesday practice was as good as it needed to be - not like the Tuesday before Kansas State," senior defensive tackle **Brandon Nicolas** said. "That's part of our thinking on defense . . . but what happened, happened. We have to learn from it, we have to practice harder."

How was the work this Tuesday?

"Better energy, better communication - which are two good signs," Hypolite said. "Those are two things we really need going into a hostile place like Texas A&M. We practiced pretty clean and didn't have to go over a lot of things."

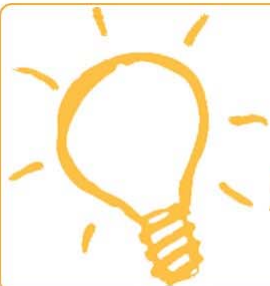
Promises, promises

With his team on a two-game losing streak and in danger of losing a month-and-a-half's worth of momentum, Missouri coach **Gary Pinkel** had his players make individual trips to his office last week and promise him their best effort against the Buffs.

You know the score.

Asked if that was a philosophical strategy worth copying, CU coach **Dan Hawkins** said, "We've done some things like that before, and coach

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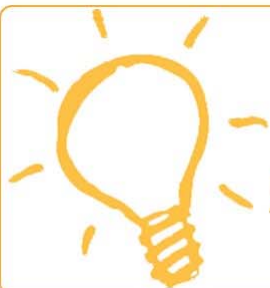
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Mac (former CU coach **Bill McCartney**) did that a few times. "You can do it a lot of ways: You can dedicate the game to somebody, you can tell me why you ought to be on the bus. . . ."

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Buffs' offense: Change coming

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Offensively, the Colorado Buffaloes can't get much worse.

That notion probably won't placate fans who cringe over last week's 58-0 loss at Missouri. And it certainly won't console the coaches or players, who know they must make massive improvement to win today at Texas A&M (noon, no TV).

Frustration has seeped into the offense's collective psyche. Exactly how much is unclear. But the Buffs enter the ninth game of the season last in the Big 12 in scoring and yards. Confidence is sagging. Bowl hopes are dwindling.

It only stands to reason that frustration will yield something different.

Will it be better? No one knows. But different? Absolutely.

"We're still trying to find solutions, and some of that has been simplified by scheme, some of that has been simplified by personnel, some of that has been a combination of both," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said. "Maybe you do two or three different things multiple ways, rather than have a spray pattern of trying five or six things."

Does that mean more use of the tight ends, or more running out of the I-formation, which CU's freshman running backs say they prefer? "Variations of everything," Helfrich said.

Obviously, coaches won't divulge too much regarding game plans. In CU's case, there might not be that much to share.

Helfrich and head coach Dan Hawkins said CU is walking a "fine line" regarding how much it can simplify the offense without becoming too simple to defend. With everything that's gone wrong in recent weeks, Helfrich said the changes coming this week will not reflect a back-to-the-drawing-board mentality. That's because the Buffs already have been there.

"It's tough," Helfrich said. "The last couple of weeks, we can't get much simpler. We just have to execute better. And when plays are there to be made, we have to make them."

There should be opportunities today. Texas A&M (3-5, 1-3) gives up yards and points. Lots of them.

In their 49-35 defeat of Iowa State, the Aggies allowed their fewest points in a Big 12 game this season. Every conference opponent has gone for at least 401 yards on Texas A&M. Its past two — Texas Tech and Iowa State — gained 561 and 574.

While the Buffs' inexperience on offense remains an issue, Texas A&M also plays some youth, having used 19 freshmen, nine true, on a regular basis in 2008. The Aggies have started two true freshmen, Trent Hunter and Terrence Frederick, in their defensive secondary in each of their past three games.

Of course, Missouri and Kansas State weren't exactly defensive juggernauts, either, and they handled the Buffs. CU hasn't scored more than 21 points since Sept. 6 against Eastern Washington. The Buffs have yet to post a 400-yard day in 2008. They've been outscored, 139-42, in their four Big 12 games.

Hawkins wouldn't reveal a starting quarterback. He indicated that Tyler Hansen and Cody Hawkins will continue to rotate. Hansen, who worked without the element of surprise against Missouri, led nine of CU's 13 drives last Saturday.

Texas A&M coach Mike Sherman said this week he's "never bet against a team with character after a loss." CU's character will be tested today.

Dan Hawkins blamed himself for last week's debacle, which makes him the center of attention. He said he expects the players to respond well.

"They'll be fine," he said.

They might be, but Cody Hawkins said frustration is evident among players, who are trying to cope with it.

"I think we're going to do a lot of different stuff this week, kind of a little bit more of what we did last year as far as shifting guys and motioning guys," Cody Hawkins said. "I think it'll be good, because it'll help solve a lot of our miscommunication errors just because we had a lot of young guys who, on the signals for certain plays, weren't getting them so well.

"I think we're going to limit what certain guys are doing and let them do specifically what they're good for."

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