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Different stakes weigh on CU-Nebraska matchup

CU needs win to stay alive; Huskers seek positioning

By Patrick Ridgell

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BOULDER — It's that time of year for Colorado and Nebraska, when questions aren't necessarily about the game they'll play, but what that game means.

CU began penciling Nebraska in as its chief rival early in Bill McCartney's coaching tenure. All indications — especially the glee the Buffs took from last year's 65-51 defeat of Nebraska — reflect that their view of things remains unchanged. Whether the other side views it the same isn't always clear.

The Nov. 28 matchup (1:30 p.m., ABC) will be Bo Pelini's first CU-Nebraska game as the Huskers' head coach. Asked Monday on the Big 12 coaches teleconference how he sees it, Pelini was pretty clear.

"There is a rivalry there, obviously, because over a long period of time, that's happened," he said. "Some emotions will be running high. Plus, you talk about it being the last game for a lot of our seniors who've done a heck of a job this year."

Nebraska and CU have split their eight meetings since 2000. This year's edition will mark the fourth time since 1997 that CU needs a win to reach bowl eligibility. In the 2007 game, both programs entered 5-6. The game hasn't determined the Big 12 North winner since 2001.

Nebraska (7-4, 4-3 Big 12) can't catch Missouri for the North title, but is bowl-eligible. At stake against the Buffs is the chance to improve postseason posture, which, based on Nebraska's tradition and bowl attendance, is already strong.

The Jan. 1 Gator Bowl has the option this year of choosing fourth among Big 12 teams, and could pit one against an ACC program. That would be a nice destination for Nebraska in Pelini's first year.

Pelini said Nebraska and CU still have a lot to play for, and added that the Buffs offer "a nice test for us." He said he'll let the players "do what they do" in regard to preparing for a rival.

"We'll talk about what we're playing for," Pelini said. "There's that aspect of it, but it won't change our approach. "Once you take the emotion out of it all, all the extra-curricular things, the outside influences, it's about playing well between the lines and executing our technique and game plan. That'll never change."

BUFF UPDATES: CU coach Dan Hawkins said he does not know if senior safeties Ryan Walters (knee and ankle sprains) and D.J. Dykes (illness) will be ready for the Nebraska game. Dykes did not play last Saturday against Oklahoma State. Walters was injured in the first quarter and did not return.

Hawkins said "we would think" freshman tailback Darrell Scott will be ready for the Huskers. Scott did not play against Oklahoma State due to his lingering ankle problem.

Hawkins shrugged off a question regarding the frustration Scott's health has caused in 2008.

“There’s a long list of those guys; he’s just one of many,” Hawkins said.

SURGING OFFENSE: The way Nebraska’s offense is scoring these days should be enough to make CU envious. In its four wins over the past five weeks, Nebraska has scored 35, 32, 45 and 56 points. It gained 610 yards on Kansas State last Saturday, 340 on the ground. Pelini said offensive coordinator Shawn Watson, who worked as CU’s offensive coordinator during coach Gary Barnett’s tenure, has done a good job all year.

“You have to evolve as a season goes on, and as you become more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of what kind of team we are,” Pelini said.

“He’s done a good job of keeping defenses off balance. We have a good mix of run and pass. We present a lot of problems for defenses.”

Hawkins said Nebraska is playing with more confidence this year than last.

“They are a lot more aggressive, a lot more full throttle,” Hawkins said.

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