



# Bufs focus on accountability

## Hawkins hopes to avoid off-field trouble through leadership

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

Colorado football coaches are determined not to endure another ugly offseason in 2009 and began taking steps to avoid it the day after this season ended with a gut-wrenching loss at Nebraska.

Coaches are dividing players into "accountability groups" this offseason as a way to get help from older players in leading freshmen and sophomores in the right direction. At least eight current or former members of the program were ticketed or arrested last winter and spring and five players became academically ineligible to play.

The "accountability groups" are designed to prevent that from happening this year because other players will have a stake in how teammates in their group perform. Several members of next year's senior class said players need to do a better job of policing themselves from now on. "Really, I think our number one thing is we've got to be accountable for each other," guard Devin Head said. "We've got to make sure we're doing the right things off the field."

"This year, I think we've got to be not always ready for the coaches to be telling us what to do, but we have to tell each other what to do."

The Bufs got together for their usual day-after weight-lifting and running session on Saturday and coaches called them into a huddle afterward to point out how quickly things change.

None of the 2008 seniors were present. They no longer had to be. Players who had been juniors on the field the day before in Memorial Stadium were now the leaders of the team. There are just 15 of them, and only 11 have logged significant playing time in their careers.

Tight end Patrick Devenny is one. He called those moments Saturday when he realized he was now a senior and a leader "an awakening."

"There are a lot of good role models for younger guys, especially new guys coming in," Devenny said of the 2009 seniors. "I think we've learned from experiences what not to do and what to do."

It was a illuminating moment for linebacker Jeff Smart, who led the Bufs in tackles this season and will be a fifth-year man next fall.

"It kind of hits you that we're moving on to another year," Smart said Monday on the first day of winter strength and conditioning with coach Jeff Pitman.

Coaches and players met as a team again Monday night when accountability was addressed once again.

It is a message with even more power now considering what transpired this season.

The off-the-field problems in the past year led to problems on the field because there were fewer eligible players to respond to depth issues that arose through injuries.

CU lost 121 games due to injury this season with 110 of them coming from players in the two-deep depth chart or on special teams units. By the end of the season, the numbers were almost unbelievable for Hawkins, who said he rarely had more than one or two season-ending injuries in previous seasons

Eleven players were out with injuries, five more were ineligible and four were forced to sit out because of transfer rules. Add 16 freshman sitting out redshirt seasons and you have a total of 36 players unavailable on game days. In many ways, the Buffs were playing almost like an NFL team, which is limited to a 53-man roster.

"Obviously that does take it's toll on the team," linebacker Bryan Stengel said. "All you can do is pretty much lead by example, try to give them the best advice you can and hope it sinks in."

Players said the areas in which they can have the biggest influence on their teammates is helping with time management and showing younger players how best to get schoolwork done along with all their other responsibilities.

Players said they can help keep each other out of trouble to a certain extent, but it also will require a higher level of personal responsibility from every individual. If a player is hell bent on pushing the boundaries and living life more like an average college student, there is only so much teammates and coaches can do.

"I think a lot of people are realizing that being a part of the football team, things aren't necessarily going to be fair," Smart said. "If a random student gets in trouble, no one is going to know about it, but if one of us does, everyone will. It's going to be in the paper and it may not be taken fair. That's just part of it.

"At the same time, probably 90 percent of the people out there would do anything to trade spots with us. We have to realize that, too. It's a privilege to be able to play college football."



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# Spring football practices likely to move to April

## Banged-up Buffs in need of time to heal

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

Spring football practices will likely be pushed back to occur entirely in April next year to allow the beat up Colorado football team ample time to heal, coach Dan Hawkins said Monday.

Eleven players suffered season-ending injuries this fall and nine of them required surgery. Head athletic trainer Miguel Rueda said seven more players are scheduled for offseason surgery in the coming weeks. The school did not identify the players.

Spring drills have started in March in recent years under Hawkins and former coach Gary Barnett. The team generally practices for one week, takes a week off for spring break and returns for three more weeks of practice before the spring game, which generally occurs on the third Saturday of April.

Those practices could be more condensed in 2009. The NCAA requires only that all 15 practices be conducted within a 34-day span.

One player known to need knee surgery is freshman place-kicker Jameson Davis, but he is hoping to delay his procedure until January.

Davis was married May 20, but has barely spent any time with his wife since because she is living in Brazil with her family. Davis and his wife speak regularly on the phone and through letters, but he is hoping to spend Christmas with her in Brazil and doesn't want to do it on crutches.

The latest player to have surgery was wide receiver Jason Espinoza, who suffered a broken collarbone twice this fall. He recently had a steel plate and six screws put in around the injured area to help stabilize it in the future. He has a six-inch scar across his right shoulder and said he is about a month from being able to fully participate in the offseason program, but it already feels more stable than before.

### Improvement coming

During his final press conference of the 2008 season on Monday, Hawkins said he believes the team is headed in the right direction despite its three consecutive losing seasons and 5-7 record this fall.

Hawkins said the overall experience and depth on the roster will improve in many areas next year and should lead to improvement in the standings. The Buffs are 13-24 in three seasons under Hawkins.

"I definitely think we're ready to make some strides," Hawkins said.

### Katoa concerns

Hawkins was unsure whether freshman linebacker Lynn Katoa would be available for spring practices. Katoa sat out this fall after getting suspended by the school in the spring for an off-campus fight. The suspension led to Katoa not making enough academic progress to be eligible.

Hawkins said not all Katoa's problems are related to academics.

"We'll see where he is," Hawkins said. "We're working on a lot of things with him."

### **Center of attention**

One of the biggest questions facing the team in spring football will be who replaces Daniel Sanders at center. The most likely candidate is sophomore Mike Iltis who is coming off a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Iltis suffered in the injury on the first day of training camp and should be close to fully cleared for spring practices.

Iltis was vying for a starting job at guard before his injury.

"That was the plan this year was for me to play next to Daniel and learn from him," Iltis said.

Other candidates who will compete for the job are Blake Behrens, who played in every game at guard this year, walk-ons Keenan Stevens and Evan Eastburn and possibly Shawn Daniels.

### **Recruiting trail**

Colorado assistant coaches had already left to begin recruiting on Monday and Hawkins leaves today to spend the majority of the next two weeks on the road.

"I'll be living out of a suitcase," he said.

Hawkins said he plans to sign 20-22 players on National Signing Day on Feb. 4 and he has plenty of work to do to get there with only eight known oral commitments. Hawkins said offensive and defensive lineman and wide receivers are a priority for this class.

Hawkins said he also plans to sign a player who can kick field goals and punt. Place-kicking was a sore spot with the Buffs this season with Davis and Aric Goodman combining to make just six of 17 attempts.

### **All-star invites**

The only member of the senior class to receive an invitation to an All-Star game so far is George Hypolite, who has been contacted about playing the Texas vs. The Nation game. The Hula Bowl, East-West Shrine game and the Senior Bowl should all send out invitations soon. Sanders, Brandon Nicolas, Brad Jones, Maurice Lucas, Ryan Walters, and Patrick Williams could be candidates for invitations.

### **Notable**

Hawkins said he plans no changes to his coaching staff beyond adding two new graduate assistant coaches. ... Hawkins said defensive end Jason Brace will not continue his football career after suffering several concussions. ... Hawkins said the winter strength and conditioning program will be tougher this year than in the past. Players have characterized previous versions as brutal.



## Woelk: Hawkins, staff enter critical offseason

By Neill Woelk

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins is entering the most critical offseason of his four years in Boulder.

After three losing seasons, expectations when the Buffs open the season next year will be significantly higher than they've been at any other time in his tenure. (Since you asked, Sept. 5 vs. Colorado State).

When Hawkins took the reins at CU in 2006, he inherited a program that had steadily been losing traction in its attempt to keep up with the rest of the Big 12.

Recruiting had slipped, the program's reputation had taken a major hit, and support -- from the public to the faculty to the administration -- had receded.

Since then, Hawkins has slowly but surely rebuilt CU's foundation. With the help of athletic director Mike Bohn and chancellor Bud Peterson, CU has steadily improved the infrastructure required to produce a solid program.

Academic support has been improved and increased. Facilities have been improved. Meanwhile, CU has rebuilt its reputation both in the public eye and through the eyes of those on campus, ranging from administration to faculty.

Meanwhile, Hawkins has improved Colorado's recruiting by increasing the talent level of incoming players while also improving the team's overall depth.

All positive steps forward -- and yet, in that same period of time, CU has seen a handful of other programs move ahead more rapidly in the Big 12.

Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma State and Texas Tech have all surpassed CU in terms of success on the field. The biggest reason for those programs' success is simple:

Continuity.

Gary Pinkel is in his eighth season at Missouri and his staff didn't change during that span. Texas Tech's Mike Leach is in his ninth year at Texas Tech. Mark Mangino is in his seventh year at Kansas. And, while this is just the fourth year for Mike Gundy at OSU, Gundy was the offensive coordinator under previous head coach Les Miles, and took over a program that already had a decent foundation from Miles' work.

If you want to see the opposite of continuity, check in at Texas A&M, Nebraska and Kansas State. Those programs have been in a state of flux in recent years, and the results reflect that instability.

No doubt, the pace of the rebuilding project at Colorado has not been to Hawkins' liking. It's been a true test for a man who knows only one speed, a man who is not accustomed to progress in tiny increments.

"In terms of wins and losses, I don't like it," Hawkins said Monday at his annual post-mortem press conference. "It's upsetting to me."

But Hawkins also knows that becoming competitive in the best conference in the nation isn't an overnight process, particularly at a school that is -- and always will be -- battling from behind in terms of pure monetary support.

Monday afternoon, Hawkins was asked whether he felt a sense of urgency as he and his staff began planning for their fourth year with the Buffs.

"I'm always that way," Hawkins said.

It's a feeling that will no doubt permeate throughout the program from now until next year. After three losing seasons, fans will want to see measurable progress.

"I definitely think we're ready to make some strides," Hawkins said.

Hawk will hit the recruiting trail today. A number of his coaches are already there. Also on tap in the near future are player evaluations and an evaluation by Hawkins of each member of his staff.

A side note: For those of you hoping for assistant coaching changes, brace yourselves. Asked whether his staff would be intact for 2009, Hawkins said, "I hope so."

Also ahead is the normal overall evaluation of the just-completed season. What worked, what didn't -- and what has to change.

"When you have a season like this, nothing is not open for discussion," Hawkins said.

Certainly, no one associated with CU football felt satisfied at the end of this season. When the Buffs dropped a heartbreaker at Nebraska on Friday, it simply put an exclamation point on a difficult year.

But that doesn't change the solid footing Hawkins and his staff have developed.

Now it will be up to them to begin building on that foundation in this very critical offseason.



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cu football

## CU coach turns focus to recruiting

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Updated: 12/01/2008 09:11:40 PM MST



Dan Hawkins (Denver Post file photo)

BOULDER — While acknowledging that a losing season sometimes "dents" recruiting a bit, Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins said Monday he likes the way things are going.

"We're slugging it out for a lot of good players," Hawkins said during his final media luncheon of the season. "A lot (the competition) are good teams."

Hawkins said he expects to sign a class in the range of 20 to 22 players. According to Rivals.com, Colorado has eight known oral commitments. Those include quarterback, Clark Evans (6-foot-5,

225 pounds) from Los Alamitos, Calif.; two in-state prospects — offensive lineman Jack Harris from Chaparral and Wheat Ridge's Parker Orms, who is being recruited as a safety; and

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three players from Texas, an area that has been targeted.

Positions of need include wide receiver and linemen on both sides, Hawkins said. CU assistant coaches already are on the road, and Hawkins is scheduled to leave today for two weeks of recruiting. Signing day is Feb. 4.

"The benefit for us (in recruiting) is, the more that coaches and players and parents are around our people and our staff, the better we feel about that," Hawkins said. "I think we have a good reputation around the country, and from in-state kids, too. I think people know what we stand for. I think that people know about us. All of that is very, very

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positive."

Hawkins addressed a variety of other topics:

He would like to settle on a quarterback during spring drills but he is not going to force a decision before the right time comes. "I think you want to," he said, "but sometimes it's like this year and you don't always get it like you want it."

Although Hawkins said he remains steadfast in his belief that an offense needs a strong running attack, "You have to replicate what the opponents do (more spread offense) to some extent" in order to prepare your defense each week, he said.

The college career of junior


## Post Poll - Dan Hawkins

Colorado finished 5-7 in Dan Hawkins' third season as coach. What do you think?

5-7 doesn't cut it: And Hawk is 13-24 at CU. Inheriting Gary Barnett's mess is not a good enough excuse.

It's a bummer, but ...: Give Hawk more time. His recruiting will pay off.

It's the zeitgeist: The Buffs are

defensive lineman Jason Brace (concussion) likely is over.

CU hopes to sign a recruit who can handle place-kicking and punting duties. He would be on

scholarship.

Because so many players will be coming off injuries and surgeries, the beginning of spring practice may be pushed back until the first week of April.

Being more experienced at most positions in 2009, CU is "definitely ready to make some strides" if it can replace three starters on the offense line, fix the kicking problems and sort out the quarterback situation, the coach said.

Of the talent level in the challenging Big 12, Hawkins said: "We have to run with the bulls a little bit."

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Longmont, Colorado  
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 2008

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## Hawkins: Progress is coming, but slowly

*By Patrick Ridgell*

*Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Colorado coach Dan Hawkins met with reporters one final time Monday to recap 2008 and look ahead to 2009. And, yes, there was a clear theme.

The coach who rarely lost at his previous jobs is not finding progress coming quickly enough at his current spot. He didn't sound angry or despondent Monday about the prospect of spending a second bowl season home in three years. He just vowed to keep trying to make things right, starting with today, when he leaves town for two weeks to recruit.

"I said when I first came here I'd be shocked if we're not right back in it," Hawkins said. "I'm just used to that. I'm just used to being right there. So is this taking longer? Yeah, it is."

"But again, like I said, people (asked) how long does it take. And I don't think you ever truly know. You throw a rock on the gas pedal and you shoot for the moon, and that's where you start climbing. Sometimes you have to dig down a little deeper to start climbing up. ... It's never as fast as you want it."

CU went 5-7 in 2008, losing out on a probable bid to the Insight Bowl when Nebraska kicker Alex Henery hit a school-record 57-yard field goal to beat the Buffs in Friday's finale.

After three seasons with Hawkins, CU is 13-24. Including its 2007 Independence Bowl loss to Alabama, CU has posted three losing seasons under Hawkins. It's been the worst three years of Buffaloes football since the first three under Bill McCartney in the early 1980s.

Hawkins signed a contract extension on Sept. 29. His job appears safe. CU athletic director Mike Bohn reacted with astonishment last month upon hearing about Kansas State firing its coach, Ron Prince, months after signing him to an extension. When CU announced Hawkins' extension, Bohn said he had faith wins will eventually come.

According to son and quarterback Cody Hawkins, the coach was not happy during the 2006 holidays, the last time CU missed a bowl. But Dan Hawkins said his sense of urgency will not change in 2009. He said it's already a strong one.

"I'm not the kind of guy that gets motivated by, 'Well, let's sit around, and if things go bad, then let's get really fired up to fix them,'" Hawkins said. "I wasn't raised that way and I don't think that way. We always have a desire to get better and improve."



Colorado head coach Dan Hawkins removes his headset in the final seconds of Friday's game against Nebraska in Lincoln, Neb. The Cornhuskers beat Colorado, 40-31, ending the Buffs' season. **Nati**

**Harnik/AP**

### Rough starts

CU has endured its worst three football seasons since Bill McCartney took over the program in 1982. Here's how McCartney's records compare to Hawkins' in each coach's first three seasons.

#### **Bill McCartney's first three years:**

**1982:** 2-8-1

**1983:** 4-7

**1984:** 1-10

#### **Dan Hawkins' first three years:**

**2006:** 2-10

**2007:** 6-7\*

**2008:** 5-7

\* = includes Independence Bowl loss to Alabama

CU has used more freshman to start games, 95, over the past two seasons than in any other two-year stretch in the team's history. The Buffs lost more than 120 player games to injury and illness in 2008. They also lost some players to grades.

Scheduled to return in 2009 are most of the offense's starters, including its leading passer, rusher and receiver. Four of the five offensive linemen who started Friday will be back, not to mention injured starters such as Ryan Miller and Max Tuioti-Mariner, plus guard Mike Iltis.

On defense, the Buffs have to replace three starting defensive linemen, but will return several linebackers and secondary members who played a lot in 2008.

Assuming he has a full roster and some experience returning in 2009, Hawkins said he believes the team will be ready to make strides next year.

"You have to feel like with the kids we have coming back, with a little bit of experience, a little bit of health and a little chip on their shoulder, that those guys will take another step for sure," he said.

The coach defended his staff, saying he "hopes" it returns intact in 2009. As he did the day CU announced his extension, Hawkins said his staff's pay and contract status — CU's assistants are at-will employees and do not sign multi-year contracts — continue to lag behind other Big 12 programs. He added that those remain issues that need to be addressed. "I really love our guys, I do, and they're darn good coaches," Hawkins said.

"You're talking about some guys that have come from some of the greatest programs in college football and have been productive. You're talking about guys that come in here and work without a contract. You're talking about guys who come in here and aren't paid what everybody else is in the conference, at the most expensive place to live in the conference.

"In recruiting, if you sit down in a house with one of our guys, you'd have to come away impressed. ... You have to look at all the factors combined of what has gone on at this place before we got here, and what has gone on now, what's going on with the conference and where we're going. You put all of that stuff together, I'll take my guys any day of the week."

Hawkins made several references to the challenges he inherited upon his arrival in December 2005, shortly after allegations of improper recruiting and other accusations cast a cloud over the program.

Hawkins said part of his challenge included replacing "foundational things." That challenge continues.

When he was asked if there was any way he could've known what he was getting himself into, Hawkins said there wasn't.

"I knew there was going to be issues," he said. "What they were? I didn't necessarily know what those were. But I came here with the full intent that there's going to be issues, going to be land mines. ... You just have to rally and solve them."

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## **Injury issues may linger, affect 2009 season**

Seven Buffs to see surgery soon

*By Patrick Ridgell  
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — The injuries that burdened Colorado football in 2008 might continue to have an effect into 2009.

Coach Dan Hawkins revealed Monday that he is considering pushing back spring drills to later in the year. He hopes to enable those Buffs who've had, or will have, surgery more time to recuperate, and give them a better chance to participate in some drills.

Last year, the team did some work in March. It might hold 2009's spring drills only in April, Hawkins said.

"You're not going to put somebody at risk and put them in a full-speed deal when they're not totally ready, but they might be able to get out there and run around and do some individual," he said.

Hawkins rarely discusses injuries during the season. CU reported Monday that seven Buffs are scheduled to have surgery over the next 10 days.

Receiver Markques Simas will have work done on a finger, and fullback Jake Behrens is having knee surgery. Guard Devin Head, cornerback Jalil Brown, defensive tackle Curtis Cunningham, guard Blake Behrens and tight end Riar Geer are having shoulder surgeries.

Also, kicker Jameson Davis is expected to have his knee scoped. Hawkins revealed in October that Davis needed work done.

Blake Behrens sprained an MCL during Friday's loss at Nebraska. Hawkins said Behrens could barely move by the end of the game.

Defensive lineman Jason Brace is not expected to return in 2009 due to concussion problems.

Linebacker Lynn Katoa's status for spring is unclear. Hawkins would not say why.

"We'll see where he is," he said. "We're working on a lot of things with him." Katoa was a highly-rated recruit from Salt Lake City who signed last December and enrolled in January. He redshirted after being involved in an off-campus fight last winter that led to his suspension from classes and spring drills.

**RECRUITING UPDATES:** Hawkins said members of his staff were out recruiting Monday. Hawkins will leave today and will be gone this week and next.

Hawkins said the offensive and defensive lines remain priorities, as usual. In terms of sheer numbers, CU needs to address its shortage at wide receiver. Hawkins also said he wants to sign a kicker/punter after the struggles endured in 2008. Kicker Aric Goodman went 5-for-14 on field goals, and Matt DiLallo lost his punting job to Tom Suazo, who's graduating.

If CU signs another place kicker, it'll have three on scholarship, including Goodman and Davis.

Hawkins said CU has 20 to 22 scholarships to fill. According to Rivals.com on Monday, it had seven known commitments.

Hawkins said that so far, recruiting is going well.

"We're slugging it out with a lot of good players and good teams," he said. "The benefit for us is the more coaches and parents and players that are around our people and staff, the better they feel." Hawkins added that he does not think the 5-7 season will hurt recruiting.

"I think it always dents it a little bit," he said. "There's no denying that.

"But I do think we have enough connections and we have enough people who know us and a proven product that the coaches know what we're about and what we're doing."

**EXTRA POINTS:** Quarterback and defensive line positions will merit much attention in the spring. Cody Hawkins, Tyler Hansen and Matt Ballenger are expected to compete for the quarterback job. Dan Hawkins said coaches will cater the offense toward the talent of the player who wins it. ... Wyoming is expected to make the hiring of Missouri offensive coordinator Dave Christensen as its new head coach official today. Hawkins said he does not know Christensen, but he's familiar with his work, which has included scoring 55 and 58 points on the Buffs the past two seasons. CU is scheduled to host Wyoming on Sept. 19.

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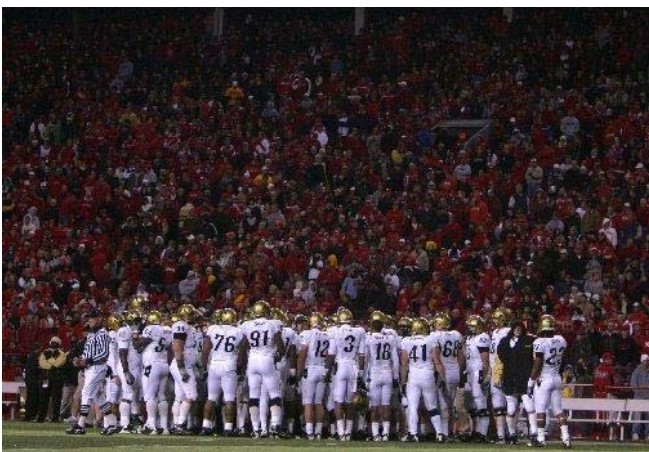
# Rocky Mountain News

## CU football coaches forging ahead

### Staff hits the road in hunt for recruits who can compete

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

Published December 1, 2008 at 7:21 p.m.



Chris Schneider / The Rocky/Chris Schneider / The Rocky

The Colorado Buffaloes gather on the sideline with their coaches just before Nebraska's Alex Henery kicked a 57-yard field goal.

For most of the next two weeks, Dan Hawkins will be living out of a suitcase, hopscotching here and there in the pursuit of prospective football recruits that might help his Colorado Buffaloes record the breakthrough season that thus far has

eluded him.

Hawkins is four days removed from the final game of his third season, a 40-31 loss at Nebraska that stamped the Buffs with a 5-7 finish and seemed no easier to digest on Monday than it did last Friday.

"The reality is, we lost, we're out of a bowl and we lost to our rival . . . those are the cold, hard facts," he said. "But our guys played their fannies off."

Now, with no bowl preparation on their itineraries, he and his staff are charged with recruiting and conducting spring practices with the same fervor.

Hawkins admitted the disappointing finish - CU lost seven of its final nine games after a 3-0 start - "always dents (recruiting) a little bit, there's no denying that. But I think we have enough connections and have enough people who know us . . . that coaches know what we're about and what we're doing."

The Buffs have seven known commitments, and Hawkins said 20-22 scholarships will be available. General areas of emphasis are receiver, both lines and a combination placekicker/punter.

Signing a scholarship combo kicker would give the Buffs four players on scholarship in that area - punter Matt DiLallo and kickers Jameson Davis and Aric Goodman, who combined to make only six of 17 field goal attempts (Goodman was 5-

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of-14, Davis 1-of-3).

Overall in recruiting, said Hawkins, "We're slugging it out . . . with a lot of really good players and a lot of good teams."

To accommodate players who were injured in-season and those who soon will undergo offseason surgery, Hawkins said the start of spring practice could be pushed into April.

Once spring drills begin, Hawkins and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich will sort through quarterbacks Cody Hawkins, Tyler Hansen and Matt Ballenger and see which is the best fit for how they want the offense to evolve.

"You can always ebb and flow one way or another (with the offense)," Dan Hawkins said, adding, "I've always said you want a quarterback who can run, but you don't want to make him your primary runner. It's a case of what you want to gear it to."

All three returning quarterbacks played this season - Hansen and Ballenger sparingly, even after Hansen's redshirt was pulled in Game 7 - but none apparently played well enough to suit Dan Hawkins, who called the prospect of a fierce spring battle at the position "an understatement."

Identifying a starting quarterback in April would be ideal, he said, but might not be feasible until fall.

After a 5-7 season, Dan Hawkins said identifying

two or three top spring issues is difficult, if not impossible: "When you have a season like this, there's nothing that's not open for discussion - nothing. And really, quite frankly, it doesn't matter if you're 10-0 or 0-10, I think you have that same zeal to start back at ground zero and go, 'OK, what the heck are we doing and how can we get better?'"

"That's always been at the heart of what we've done. It doesn't matter what you do, it's always open to (research and development)."

Hawkins, whose three-year CU record is 13-24, was asked if the 2008 finish creates more of a personal sense of urgency for 2009. Not necessarily, he indicated, noting he is not a person who "sits around, and if things go bad, then let's get really fired up and fix them. . . . I wasn't raised that way and I don't think that way. You always have a desire to get better."

He believes, however, the Buffs "are ready to make some strides" in 2009 because they should be deeper and more experienced. However, issues at quarterback, in the defensive line (three senior starters graduate) and in the kicking game must be resolved, he added.

"But you've got to feel with the kids we have coming back, with a little bit of experience, a little bit of health, a little chip on their shoulders, those guys will be ready to take another step," he said.

**ETC.:** Hawkins was noncommittal about the spring status of freshman linebacker **Lynn**

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# Rocky Mountain News

**Katoa**, who redshirted this season: "We're working on a lot of things with him." . . .

Defensive end **Jason Brace** (concussions) is not expected to return to football. . . . For consistency's sake, Hawkins said he hopes his staff remains intact: "I'll take my guys any day of the week." . . . If any schematic defensive changes are made, they will be minor after studying what other Big 12 Conference teams are doing. Hawkins believes players have developed a comfort level with what CU is running.

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# Rocky Mountain News

## KRIEGER: Hawkins' task tougher than he thought

By **Dave Krieger**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published December 1, 2008 at 9:32 p.m.



Photo by Brian Lehmann / The Rocky

Dan Hawkins pauses on his way out of Memorial Stadium after his Buffaloes lost a painful nail-biter to Nebraska.

Not that it makes 5-7 any easier to deal with, but this is actually a sign of progress: Four years after CU football self-immolated, the complaints have returned to the mundane.

It is as though a giant cloud of dementia blew across the Front Range and everybody forgot what Dan Hawkins walked into.

"There was two years of detonation in there," he says now, using the demolition man's metaphor.

"Because of the issues that went on for a couple years, you know there's going to be foundational things that you have to replace. You know that."

Today's griping about the record is mostly context-free, which is the easiest kind. This is the program that overshadowed two Nobel prize winners in physics by providing late-night comics with a party school punch line.

After a spectacular implosion that took out a football coach, an athletic director, a chancellor and a university president, CU football had to clean up its toxic spill before it could rebuild. Much of the work so far has been largely invisible to the outside world.

"At the end of the day, it's big boy football," Hawkins said Monday before heading back out on the recruiting trail. "There's a faction of people that are going to look at how many ticks do you have on the left-hand side and how many ticks do you have on the right-hand side. And you understand that. That's part of the business.

"That being said, as you look at that, you go, 'OK, that's a certain phase of it.' But when you're trying to improve things and you're trying to get better, you can't just look at that. You have to look at all the infrastructure things that you're trying to work on to help you improve those numbers."

Gary Barnett used to chafe at CU's academic requirements, knowing he couldn't recruit kids his Big 12 rivals could. With little choice after walking into a bomb crater, Hawkins embraced those requirements. Over the last three years, he has overseen a broad expansion of the program's academic support system.

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"To me, that's everything," he said. "That helps you in recruiting and retention and performance of the guys that are here. That process right there is eight miles better than what it was when I first came here."

Why should this matter to Buff fans? Consider the case of wide receiver Markques Simas, who was academically ineligible this season. He would have been the team's best wideout by a lot. *Phil Steele's College Football* made him a fourth-team all conference selection sight unseen. If the expanded academic support system can restore his eligibility, it will be a big boost not only for the team, but for the promise of its new academic infrastructure.

Hawkins admits the turnaround is taking longer than he expected. Of course, he expected it to take no time at all. At his two previous stops, Willamette and Boise State, he won 80 percent of his games. So 13-24 is uncharted territory.

Being competitive with the much better financed elite programs of the Big 12 is a challenge for CU in the best of circumstances. Frankly, there is no way to know yet whether Hawkins is up to that task. But considering what he walked into, three years is hardly enough time to judge, as athletic director Mike Bohn acknowledged last month when he extended Hawkins' contract through 2012.

Arguing the merits of perseverance, Hawkins points to Missouri. Gary Pinkel started slowly and treaded water from there for a while. "They wanted to run 'em out after about five or six

years," Hawkins said. "But those nine guys sticking together looking at the issues, solving the problems, now where are they?"

That would be the Big 12 championship game, for the second year in a row.

Which goes to show, among other things, how much difference a quarterback can make. Finding one should be Hawkins' top priority for 2009, with a kicker running a close second. The recruiting touch that has kept Boise State at the top of the Western Athletic Conference since he left began to show up this year at CU in highly touted running back Darrell Scott and other impressive freshmen. But blue-chip recruits must now come with detailed specifications.

"We have some unique living situations here and academic situations and football situations, and we're looking for the kid that fits that," Hawkins said.

"I think we separate ourselves very well, given the niche that we try to recruit to, and that is a good student that wants to live in a great place, that wants to be at a place that's won a national championship and aspires to do it again. So we're looking for that guy."

Given the recent history, that's the right model. At some point, wins and losses will have to justify Bohn's faith that Hawkins can execute it. For now, rebuilding the right way will have to suffice as a mile marker.

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