



CU kicked out of bowl party

Huskers sink Buffs with late FG, interception for TD

By Kyle Ringo
Friday, November 28, 2008

LINCOLN, Neb. -- Fifty-seven yards separated the Colorado football team from Tempe, Ariz., Friday evening and Nebraska place-kicker Alex Henery covered it with one mighty swing of his right leg.

Deep in the fourth quarter with his team stalled on fourth-down-and-25, trailing by one and out of options, Henery trotted to near midfield at Memorial Stadium for a last-ditch shot at victory. If you need to read the next few sentences, you just don't know what kind of season it's been for the Buffs.

The senior from Omaha made the kick, set a new school record for longest field goal and helped swipe an Insight Bowl berth right out from under CU. The Buffs ultimately lost 40-31 after defensive lineman Ndamukong Suh returned an interception 30 yards for a score in the final minute.

"All I remember is hitting the ball," said Henery, who said he had missed all of his attempts from that distance in pregame warmups. "I don't remember much after that."

The loss rocked the Buffs, especially a small group of seniors who came so close to reaching the postseason they could almost taste before it was taken away.

"Proud of 'em," coach Dan Hawkins said afterward when asked what he told his team. "I was really proud of them. I don't think I've ever been more proud of one of our teams. Our guys battled and scrapped. They gave it everything they had. There was not an inch left."

Perhaps the most disappointing part about the loss was that it came in what might have been the team's best overall game. The Buffs had scored more than 17 points in a Big 12 Conference game just once this season, but finished with 31. The defense made it difficult for a potent Huskers attack to get into the end zone forcing a field goal or turnover on four of six Nebraska trips inside the 20 yard line.

And CU's beleaguered special teams even played themselves to a near draw. They fumbled a kickoff and consistently gave Nebraska good field position on its returns, but Josh Smith had a fine day in the return game (193 yards) and Jimmy Smith turned the Huskers' fake field goal attempt into seven points for the Buffs.

"We knew they were going to try to do some type of fake to get some easy points," Smith said of his 58-yard fumble return just before halftime. "We knew it was coming. They called it out and I sniffed it out and we scored off of it."

It was the second time in three games Nebraska had tried the same fake field goal play and film study had the Buffs prepared for it. The Huskers had been successful with the fake in fourth-down-and-eight,

gaining nine yards in ugly fashion against Kansas.

Nebraska coach Bo Pelini said had the Huskers lost the game, it would have been his fault for calling the fake, the result of which gave momentum back to the Buffs and evened the score.

The game-winning kick also bailed out quarterback Joe Ganz, whose costly fumble on a play-action fake on third-and-goal in the third quarter surely would have been remembered in a Nebraska loss.

Ganz finished the day completing 19 of 26 passes for 229 yards and the two scores. Tailback Roy Helu Jr. was the biggest problem for the Buffs. He touched the ball 30 times and gained a total of 215 yards.

Hawkins and his Buffs headed back to campus 5-7 this season with a long nine months of work to look forward to before their next opportunity to prove themselves.

It's now three years and counting for CU fans waiting for the Buffs' first winning season under Hawkins. Colorado's coach has guided the Buffs to a 13-24 record, including a 1-2 mark against the reviled Huskers. CU finished 2-6 in Big 12 play for second time in the past three years.

"I think clearly we're on the right path and guys are doing the right things and they've got a great future ahead of them," Hawkins said. "I thought we finished. We got a little more aggressive last week against Okie State and we got more aggressive this week and more confident.

"So I think the guys have a little more belief going into the offseason. When we get all healed up and grow up, we're going to be fine."

Had they won Friday, the Buffs likely would have been headed to the New Year's Eve Insight Bowl in Arizona.

Jerry Anderson, a member of the Board of Directors for the Independence Bowl, said his bowl preferred Kansas over Colorado because the Buffs just played in Shreveport, La., last season. Anderson said the Insight Bowl would have been the most likely destination for the Buffs.

The first half might have been the most entertaining 30 minutes of football all season with each team putting up 24 points and Colorado doing so with a slew of big plays including five of the 12 longest plays of the season.

The Buffs offense struggled all season, but it looked like a refined and polished unit on its first two possessions. The Buffs scored a pair of touchdowns in the first 4 minutes on two drives of two plays.

Quarterback Cody Hawkins found tight end Riar Geer down the seam on a 68-yard pitch and catch to begin the scoring on the second play from scrimmage. Hawkins connected with wide receiver Josh Smith on a 44-yard pass on the first play of the Buffs' second drive, and Demetrius Sumler scored on a 36-yard run on the next play.

The Buffs led 14-0 and a stunned crowd of 85,319 hemmed and hawed in frustration.

Nebraska rebounded quickly with 17 consecutive points. Ganz, who deemed Friday's contest "a redemption game" for his poor performance in Boulder last season, connected on two touchdown passes near the end of the first quarter. He hit Nate Swift over the shoulder on a two-yard play and found tight end Mike McNeill for a 53 yard score. McNeill badly beat linebacker Shaun Mohler on the play.



CU still discussing contract extension with KOA

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, November 29, 2008

LINCOLN, Neb. --- The voices of the Colorado Buffaloes --- Mark Johnson, Larry Zimmer and Charles Johnson --- packed up with the rest of the crew from KOA radio Friday evening at Memorial Stadium with no assurance they will be back to call CU football games in the future.

The five-year radio agreement between KOA, CU and its licensing partner, Learfield Communications, Inc., ends when the men's basketball season is over. Talks are well underway for another five-year extension, but nothing has been finalized.

KOA has been broadcasting the Buffs continuously since the 1985 season, and has generally extended the deal in five-year increments. Athletic director Mike Bohn said the school is happy with its relationship with KOA, which provides a powerful signal that can be heard throughout most of the state during the day and throughout many neighboring states at night.

But Bohn said there has been interest from others who have proposed providing similar coverage through a network of stations. Learfield, which recently agreed to an extension of its relationship with CU, is responsible for securing a radio deal.

"I've got a lot of confidence in our rights holder to continue to escalate our visibility and our partnership and would anticipate them completing a radio agreement early in the new year," Bohn said.

Tough stuff

True freshman safety Patrick Mahnke played in place of Walters for the second consecutive game and produced a sack of Nebraska quarterback Joe Ganz that ultimately led to the game-winning 57-yard field goal.

Mahnke finished the game with five tackles and was praised by coach Dan Hawkins for playing with a broken rib and a separated shoulder suffered during the game. Nebraska held a huge advantage in time of possession, holding the ball for nearly 40 minutes, compared to 20 for the Buffs.

"It hurts, but you gotta do what you gotta do, I guess," Mahnke said.

Jones finishes strong

Senior linebacker Brad Jones served as defensive team captain Friday in place of fellow senior Ryan Walters, who was unable to play because of a sprained ankle and knee. Jones registered two of the Buffs' four sacks Friday and led the team this season with seven sacks.

Jones had produced just 2½ sacks in 1,545 plays in his first three years in the program, when he was used more in pass coverage than pass rushing.

J-Fly moves up

Josh Smith produced the best outing of his young career in terms of all-purpose yardage. He finished the day with 245 all-purpose yards, pushing him to No. 2 on CU's single-season list.

Only former tailback Rashaan Salaam has produced more total yardage in one season than Smith. That came during his run to the 2004 Heisman Trophy, when he racked up 2,349 yards.

Smith finished the 2008 campaign with 1,987 yards, the vast majority of which came from kickoff returns. He also caught 32 passes for 387 yards. Smith passed former running back Eric Bieniemy and Byron "Whizzer" White on Friday.

Notable

Colorado has now missed a bowl game in four of the past nine seasons. ... According to CU sports information staff, 44 of the 70 players who traveled to Lincoln had never been in Memorial Stadium before. ... Wide receiver Scotty McKnight finished the season with 46 catches for 519 yards, becoming the first player to lead the Buffs in receiving in consecutive seasons since Javon Green did so in 1999 and 2000. McKnight now has 1,007 career receiving yards. ... Despite his struggles this season, CU place-kicker Aric Goodman led the team in scoring with 45 points. It is the lowest total to lead the team since Sal Aunese and Bieniemy each scored 36 in 1987. ... CU sold 3,600 of its allotment of 3,800 tickets for the game, but the black and gold section in the stadium appeared to be smaller than previous years.



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Bufs say heartbreak will be motivation

Players say no bowl will be plenty of impetus to improve

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, November 29, 2008

LINCOLN, Neb. --- A youthful Colorado football team learned a lot of tough lessons this season, but the most difficult might still be coming.

After falling in heartbreaking fashion 40-31 at Nebraska on Friday, the Buffs wake up today to the reality they will be sitting home watching the bowl season on television and enduring plenty of extra work with strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman.

Some of the older players on this year's team endured this scenario in 2006, and it wasn't pleasant, but it helped them find a way to a bowl game in 2007. They're hoping it has a similar effect this time around, albeit a longer-lasting one.

"It's going to be hard to sit there and watch that," tailback Demetrius Sumler said. "But it's going to give us some motivation to work harder and make sure it don't ever happen again."

The Buffs started fast Friday but weren't able to hold a double-digit first-quarter lead, established through good game planning by coaches, who saw holes in the Nebraska defense and exploited them.

That got tougher to do as the game wore on and Nebraska coaches responded with answers.

Only 18 members of the Buffs' 70-man travel roster had played a game at Nebraska prior to Friday, and only nine of them had been involved in plays from scrimmage. The other nine had special teams playing time in the 2006 game here.

Players expect the experience gained in Friday's game in front of 85,000 roaring fans in red, and other games like it this season, will pay dividends in future years. It's small consolation at this point, but something to hang a hat on as offseason workouts, bowl watching and soul searching begin.

"You know it's going to be tough, but I think a lot of young guys saw how important it is to go into a hostile environment and fight heart and soul to try to get that win," Hawkins said.

The Buffs finished with a losing record and failed to make a bowl game a year after playing in the Independence Bowl. By some standards, it was a step backward for the program. But players weren't ready to call it a failure Friday, a challenging and often frustrating learning experience, sure, but not a failure.

"We played some of the best football teams in the country week in and week out," defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "We didn't have too many cupcakes, as sports writers call them, on our schedule."

Obviously we were a younger team this year than we were last year, a lot less veterans. We hit some rough patches and some rough times, but I think that our (record) is not indicative of how well we played. Anybody who watched us, realizes we played a lot better this year."



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Woelk: In the end, no surprise for bad-news Buffs

By Neill Woelk
Saturday, November 29, 2008

One play.

In a season that's been an uphill battle for the last two months, it's somehow fitting that Colorado's last-gasp hopes for a bowl game -- the Buffs' absolute final opportunity to keep a season alive -- came down to an opponent achieving the near impossible.

Fourth-and-25, time running out, and heavily favored Nebraska needing the longest field goal in school history to escape with a win.

Of course it was good. Could there have been any doubt? Lady Luck has avoided the Buffaloes all season; no reason to think she would suddenly choose to find a seat on CU's sidelines in the waning minutes of the last game.

Kick good.

Buffs done for 2008.

The wry smile on Dan Hawkins' face as the attempt went through spoke volumes. In a season when all the breaks have been bad, Hawk didn't look surprised. That's simply the way the season went for the Buffaloes.

What's interesting this morning is the reaction of folks after what might have been one of the most entertaining games Colorado has played in years.

Today, people around the Big 12 are gravely pointing to Nebraska and declaring that Bo Pelini has turned the Huskers around in one year.

But if Alex Henery had missed that field goal -- fair question, here -- would Pelini be a worse coach this morning? Would that turnaround still be impressive? Or would he be catching grief for losing to Colorado?

Ditto for Hawkins. Even though the Buffs played without their starting safeties and a patchwork offensive line, they came out with a decent plan and made a game of it. If the longest field goal in Nebraska history had gone wide right, would Hawkins be a better coach today?

The answer to all the questions, of course, is "no."

Sometimes, stuff happens.

Pelini has certainly made a difference in one year at NU. When he took the job, he kept coordinator Shawn Watson, lending some stability and continuity to the offense, which gave him more time to concentrate on defense. He inherited a good starting quarterback, a seasoned offensive line, some solid running backs and a veteran defense. NU has recruited well over the last four years; Pelini gets full credit for molding those veteran players into a team.

But if there's anything we've learned this year in college football, it's to be very careful in making rash assessments after one season. (For more in-depth info here, call Notre Dame fans).

As for Colorado -- there's no doubt lots of work to be done.

If you watched carefully Friday, you saw the majority of Colorado's big plays come from players who will be back a year from now. Jimmy Smith. Patrick Mahnke. Shaun Mohler. B.J. Beatty. Riar Geer. Demetrius Sumler. Josh Smith. All but Geer are Hawkins recruits.

Now throw in the return of players such as Ryan Miller, Rodney Stewart, Jonathan Major, Markques Simas, Max Tuioti-Mariner, Lynn Katoa and Sione Tau, and the picture gets a little better.

The biggest missing pieces on Friday? A cohesive offensive line and consistent, effective quarterback play.

The O-line shouldn't be an issue. Next year, the Buffs return almost a dozen players with starting experience up front. It could be the position at which Colorado improves the most.

But if the Buffs are going to step up to the next level -- Camera beat writer Kyle Ringo gave the Buffs a C-minus for the season, a fair grade -- they'll need to improve their quarterback play.

Friday, Cody Hawkins was just good enough to keep the Buffs in the game, but not quite good enough to make the difference in the end. Meanwhile, after a terrific debut midway through the season, Tyler Hansen played like a true freshman down the stretch.

It will be one of the biggest questions marks throughout the offseason.

Maybe freshman Clark Evans will be good enough to step in and take over right away. Maybe Hansen will improve enough to earn the starting job on a regular basis. Or, maybe Cody Hawkins will erase the deficiencies in his game that limit his ability to be effective in all situations.

Bad luck? The rule of thumb in any sport is that good teams create their own luck. This year, the Buffs weren't good enough to produce breaks in their favor.

That has to change.

No doubt, if Dan Hawkins had his way, he'd start spring ball tomorrow. But no matter what, the head coach who will be in his fourth year at CU will have to answer these questions at the end of the 2009 season:

Has he recruited well? Have the players he has recruited improved after their arrival? Has the record improved? And, is there a foundation of good players that suggests improvement is not a one-year

aberration?

Get ready for a very interesting -- and very long -- offseason.



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sports

Given the boot

With heartbreaking loss to Nebraska, CU won't go to a bowl

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Updated: 11/29/2008 12:12:07 AM MST



Nebraska's Ndamukong Suh glances backwards at Colorado's Daniel Sanders as he runs for a touchdown on an interception against Colorado in the second half of their college football game, in Lincoln, Neb., Friday, Nov. 28, 2008. Nebraska beat Colorado 40-31. (FR67562 AP | Dave Weaver)

LINCOLN, Neb. — Can it get any stranger than this?

Needing a victory to become bowl-eligible, Colorado (5-7) finally got its offense going early Friday but couldn't stop Nebraska's late rally in a 40-31 loss to the Cornhuskers before 85,319 in Memorial Stadium.

Trailing 31-30 with less than 2 minutes to play, the Huskers scored 10 points in 48 seconds to seal the victory.

After Nebraska kicker Alex Henery salvaged a drive with a 57-yard field goal, his fourth of the game, with 1:43 to play to take a 33-31 lead, the Huskers' defense came up with a big play.

The Buffs were moving the ball on the ensuing drive, but quarterback Cody Hawkins' pass on second-and-10 from the the Buffs' 33 was tipped by linebacker Tyler Wortman and caught by lineman Ndamukong Suh, who returned it 30 yards for a touchdown with 55 seconds left.

"We've got a lot of upset dudes, including myself," Hawkins said. "Everybody in there really put their heart and soul into this game. We were right there in it until the end, but unfortunately it didn't go our way."

An 18-point underdog, Colorado went ahead 31-27 in the third quarter when sophomore tailback Demetrius Sumler scored his second touchdown of the game, this time off left guard on fourth-and-goal from the 4. It completed a nine-play, 65-yard march.

After pulling within 31-30, the Huskers (8-4, 5-3 Big 12) got to the Buffs 25-yard line with three minutes to play, but on second-and-10, Joe Ganz dropped back to pass but was sacked for a 15-yard loss by Patrick Mahnke. Facing third-and-25, Ganz's pass was incomplete, setting up Henery's long field-goal attempt.

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Nebraska coach Bo Pelini and Henery talked about the kick during timeout.

"I wanted him to look me in the face and tell me he had it in him," Pelini said.

Henery hesitated at first.

"I have to admit I was a little iffy," he said. "I knew it was a long ways, and there wasn't much wind. I knew I'd have to hit it real well."

Henery made a 52-yarder in warm-ups. With the chance to win the game, he figured, what's 5 more yards?

"I told him I would make it," Henery said.

That's all Pelini needed to hear.

"I don't remember watching it go through at all," Henery said of the kick. "I was pretty sure I made it. It was on target."

The Buffs finished with 291 yards of offense to the Huskers' 407. Nebraska had a 19 minute, 15 second advantage in time of possession and ran 77 plays to the Buffs' 48.

Nebraska's Roy Helu Jr. finished with 166 yards rushing on 25 carries, while Ganz was 19-of-26 passing for 229 yards and two touchdowns.

Hawkins was 14-of-24 for 249 yards but threw three interceptions and was sacked four times. Sumler led the Buffs with 65 yards on nine carries, but Colorado finished with just 42 total rushing yards.

Colorado had already bettered its season scoring average (19.2) by halftime.

Thanks to a 58-yard return of a lateral for a touchdown by sophomore cornerback Jimmy Smith off a botched kick fake, Colorado went into halftime even at 24-24.

In just the first 30 minutes, Colorado registered five of its 12 longest plays (offensive or defense) of the year. That included a crowd-quieting 68-yard touchdown throw from Hawkins to junior tight end Riar Geer on the game's second play from scrimmage. Wide open on a fly pattern down the left hash mark, Geer caught the pass in full stride and outraced Nebraska defensive backs before diving across the goal line.

After Nebraska's first possession stalled and the Cornhuskers were forced to punt, Colorado took a quick 14-0 lead. Playing loose, and guessing right against Nebraska's defense, the Buffs again needed just two plays to go the distance.

A 44-yard Hawkins pass to sophomore wideout Josh Smith on another fly pattern set up a 36-yard touchdown run by Sumler. Not known for his speed, Sumler raced untouched around left end for the longest gain of his college career.

Perhaps as stunned as its fans, Nebraska woke up on its third possession. The Huskers moved 64 yards on nine plays, with Ganz doing the honors by flipping a 2-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Nate Smith.

After rallying from a two-touchdown deficit, Nebraska took the lead twice in the first half but could not hold it. Up 24-17, the Huskers lined up for an apparent 50-yard field-goal attempt when they tried some trickery that blew up like an exploding cigar.

Rather than place the ball down, holder Jake Wesch tried to lateral the ball to Henery by flipping the ball

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blindly over his shoulder. Jimmy Smith smelled it and caught the lateral in the air and easily outraced the holder 58 yards in the other direction.

That was Smith's second career touchdown. The other came on an interception return last year in the victory over Nebraska at Boulder.

"Our guys battled and scrapped and gave it everything they had. Not an inch left," CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Longmont, Colorado
 Tuesday, December 02,
 2008

Publish Date: 11/29/2008

Nebraska's record-setting field goal in waning minutes ends CU's season

By Patrick Ridgell
 Longmont Times-Call

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Cornhuskers had the momentum, the confidence, the health, the home field, the chips on their shoulders and a serious hankering to make Colorado spend the holidays at home.

Turned out, they needed a field-goal kicker who did something no one ever has in program history.

Alex Henery hit a school-record 57-yard field goal with 1 minute, 43 seconds left Friday to give Nebraska the lead. Then 48 seconds later, as CU tried to drive for a winning kick, Nebraska's Ndamukong Suh intercepted a pass from quarterback Cody Hawkins that defensive end Zach Potter batted into the air. Suh returned it 30 yards for a touchdown. It accounted for the final score: Nebraska 40, CU 31.

The wild conclusion fit a game that was wild all day. CU scored two touchdowns and gained 148 yards on its first four plays, all before five minutes elapsed. CU also scored right before halftime when Jimmy Smith grabbed a mid-air lateral, foiling Nebraska's fake field goal attempt, and took it 58 yards to the end zone.

The Buffs' defense was on the field for 39:36, yet never wilted, especially when Nebraska reached the red zone. The Huskers penetrated CU's 20 six times. They came away with only two touchdowns and three field goals.

But the crazy things that transpired and good things they did Friday won't cheer up the Buffs. They finish 2008 at 5-7, not eligible for the postseason for the second time in three seasons under coach Dan Hawkins. They're only eligible to watch the 34 bowl games in December and January, a fate Nebraska players declared they wanted to inflict on the team who did the same to them a year ago.

"(Henery) hasn't made one all year that far," Smith said. "I guess they deserved it today."

Hawkins suggested his team deserved it, too.

"I was really proud of them," Hawkins said. "I don't think I've ever been prouder of one of our teams. Guys were battling; they scrapped, they gave it everything they had."

"(Freshman safety) Pat Mahnke played most of the second half with a separated shoulder. Those guys, nothing but guts, man."

Hawkins said guard Blake Behrens was so injured by game's end, "he could barely move."

Smith said seniors were crying in CU's locker room after the game. Cody Hawkins said there were some "upset dudes" in there, himself included. Tailback Demetrius Sumler said staying home from a bowl means "pain, agony."



Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins hangs his head Friday after a bitter loss to Nebraska in Lincoln. **Joshua Buck/Times-Call**

Times-Call Multimedia
 Slide Show

[Nebraska Stuns Colorado 40-31](#)

"It's going to be hard to sit here and watch that, but it's going to give us motivation to work harder and make sure this doesn't ever happen again," Sumler said.

Henery's longest field goal before Friday's clutch kick was 48 yards, and Nebraska's previous record was 55. His kick came on a fourth-and-25 from CU's 40, two plays after Mahnke, also playing with a broken rib, sacked quarterback Joe Ganz for a 15-yard loss.

Henery had to sell Huskers coach Bo Pelini on letting him kick. Nebraska had one timeout remaining, meaning if it turned the ball over to CU without scoring, CU could run out the clock.

Pelini told his sophomore kicker to look him in the face and say he could make it. The wind was calm. The Memorial Stadium crowd of 85,319 was nervous.

According to Pelini, here's what happened next:

"He kind of looked at it. Normally his range is around 52. He looked at me and said, 'I made it in warmups. I've been hitting it good.' And I said, 'All right, let's go.'"

It was the fourth kick Henery made Friday. Apparently, Pelini must have misunderstood what his kicker said.

"I hadn't been hitting it that far in the pre-game," Henery said. "We have our distances set, and I didn't hit one that far in the pre-game."

"I don't remember watching it go through at all."

CU had a second-and-10 at the 33 when Potter batted Hawkins' pass into the air and Suh snagged it. It was Hawkins' second interception on a batted pass Friday.

"Everybody knows I'll be lucky if I ever get listed at 6-foot, and (Potter) is 6-7," Cody Hawkins said. "He did a good job."

He added, "I might have been a little frustrated from the play before that."

On the previous play, Hawkins lofted one deep down the right hash mark that almost floated right into Pat Devenny's hands. Nebraska's Lance Thorell broke it up, keeping CU out of Nebraska territory.

"I need to put a little more air under that ball," Cody said. "Pat's a guy who can go make plays for you. I didn't put him in a position to make a play."

CU suffered its share of lopsided losses in 2008 and squeaked out some narrow wins. But what happened Friday at Nebraska and Nov. 1 at Texas A&M, when the Buffs outplayed their host for three quarters but lost, will gnaw at them for weeks to come.

A win in either game would have given them the required six wins to play in a bowl game, which would have made a difficult season easier to recollect in the future. Instead, the future is offseason conditioning and watching others in bowl games.

"We showed we can make the plays that a lot of people have been saying we can't make, but they just made a big kick down the stretch," Sumler said. "We showed we have a lot of potential. Some of our young guys got a lot of confidence. We're going to start pushing forward, starting Monday."

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

NEBRASKA 40, COLORADO 31

Colorado

141070—31

Nebraska

1410313—40

First Quarter

Col—Geer 68 pass from C.Hawkins (Goodman kick), 14:06.

Col—Sumler 36 run (Goodman kick), 10:33.

Neb—Swift 2 pass from Ganz (Henery kick), 5:46.

Neb—McNeill 53 pass from Ganz (Henery kick), 4:04.

Second Quarter

Neb—FG Henery 35, 12:08.

Col—FG Goodman 37, 9:08.

Neb—Castille 1 run (Henery kick), 2:03.

Col—Ji.Smith 58 fumble return (Goodman kick), 1:11.

Third Quarter

Neb—FG Henery 27, 9:49.

Col—Sumler 4 run (Goodman kick), 5:39.

Fourth Quarter

Neb—FG Henery 37, 8:09.

Neb—FG Henery 57, 1:43.

Neb—Suh 30 interception return (Henery kick), :55.

A—85,319.

ColNeb

First downs

13 23

Rushes-yards

22-42 51-178

Passing

249 229

Comp-Att-Int

14-26-3 19-26-0

Return Yards

0 55

Punts-Avg.

3-35.7 1-44.0

Fumbles-Lost

1-1 4-2

Penalties-Yards

2-14 3-15

Time of Possession

20:24 39:36

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Colorado, Sumler 9-65, Hansen 3-11, Scott 2-(minus 1), C.Hawkins 8-(minus 33). Nebraska, Helu 25-166, Castille 12-12, Ganz 13-9, Wesch 1-(minus 9).

PASSING—Colorado, C.Hawkins 14-24-3-249, McKnight 0-1-0-0, Team 0-1-0-0. Nebraska, Ganz 19-26-0-229.

RECEIVING—Colorado, McKnight 4-58, Geer 2-86, Jo.Smith 2-52, Crawford 2-20, Deehan 1-22, Melton 1-7, Williams 1-3, Devenny 1-1. Nebraska, Helu 5-49, Peterson 4-44, McNeill 3-70, Me.Holt 3-42, Swift 2-10, Paul 1-11, Castille 1-3.

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Longmont, Colorado
Tuesday, December 02,
2008

Publish Date: 11/29/2008

CU's key to success: Stop attrition

Longmont Times-Call

LINCOLN, Neb. — First things first. This is a rivalry.

Anyone who doubts that wasn't standing on the Memorial Stadium sideline when Nebraska's kicker pulled a 57-yard field goal out of some hat, sending the Huskers' sideline and stands into a frenzy. Nor did they see dozens of Huskers jog off the field after they won without shaking the hands of visitors they clearly disdain. And, clearly, they ignored the calls from Lincoln this week, when the Huskers declared they wanted to sentence CU to a holiday season without a bowl.

There was nothing at stake Friday for the Huskers besides the chance at revenge. They got it. Then they celebrated.

"I'm just glad we could go out winners, instead of going out the other way," Nebraska quarterback Joe Ganz said.

Ahh, the other way. Ganz wasn't directly referring to CU, but the other way is one the Buffs now know well.

For the second time in three years, they'll sit and stew rather than practice and prepare next month. There are 68 Division I teams headed to bowls, and CU isn't one of them. Tailback Demetrius Sumler said it'll be "pain, agony."

There's been a lot of pain in coach Dan Hawkins' tenure. The man who is 13-24 in three seasons in Boulder gripped both sides of a lectern in the postgame news conference and glared straight ahead, wearing a look of defiance. He fielded several of the same old questions. He said he's never been prouder of one of his CU teams. Then he offered a few thoughts that are open to interpretation.

"It's never fun sitting around watching everybody else play," he said. "But you know, it's interesting. ... It's easy to sit out there and write about everybody else's failures and successes, but there's something about living in the fire. Until you do that, until you have enough guys to do that, you never experience the highs and you never experience the lows.

"Clearly we're on the right path, and guys are doing the right things and they have a great future ahead of them. ... I think the guys have the belief that going into the offseason, that if we get all healed up and grown up, we're going to be fine."

CU lost more than 120 player games to injury or illness in 2008. Forty-two times, it started a freshman. That's 95 freshman starts over the past two years, which is the most in program history.

Academic challenges remain. Coaches and staff sweat out the grades of several players every semester. Losing receiver Markques Simas in the summer stung badly.

And then there's the suspensions and dismissals for things like off-campus fights.

Every program battles attrition. CU just appeared to battle a perfect storm of it in 2008. This was an excuse everyone grew sick of hearing and all Buffs became sick of making. That doesn't make it any less relevant, though.

Next year, the schedule features road games at West Virginia, Texas and Oklahoma State. Kansas will return the same quarterback that has beaten the Buffs three years in a row. Don't expect Missouri or Nebraska to fall far even though both lose their quarterbacks. Think Colorado State will be easy?

Think again.

If CU loses a bunch of key players in 2009, it'll probably have another bad year. That's reality. If the program wants to succeed, it must stem some of this attrition.

Otherwise, a year from now, we'll not only wonder just how big of a rivalry this thing between CU and Nebraska is. We'll also wonder what four straight losing seasons means.

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Longmont, Colorado
Tuesday, December 02,
2008

Publish Date: 11/29/2008

Nebraska manages to survive its own tricks

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

LINCOLN, Neb. — Colorado needed two hands to count the number of trick plays Nebraska pulled last time it visited Memorial Stadium.

There were six of them that day in 2006. Some yielded big plays. One was a touchdown pass to a defensive end on a fake field goal.

Nebraska was up to its old tricks again in Friday's 40-31 defeat of CU. This time, the results were different.

Late in the second quarter, Nebraska tried a fake field goal that coach Bo Pelini later called a "bone-headed play." Holder Jake Wesch took the snap and then lateraled the ball over his head toward kicker Alex Henery, who was going to try and run for a first down.

CU's Jimmy Smith anticipated it. He plucked the ball out of mid-air and strolled 58 yards for an easy touchdown.

Trying a 50-yard field goal wasn't stupid. Trying the exact same fake play that you used three weeks earlier — and it barely worked then — is another deal.

On Nov. 8 against Kansas, Henery took the lateral, stumbled nine yards to convert fourth-and-8 before he nearly fumbled the ball out of bounds.

CU coach Dan Hawkins said special teams coach Kent Riddle was "all over that," after having seen it in film study.

"Down here a couple of years ago, we gave up a few plays on special teams," Hawkins said. "But I thought coach Rid did a great job preparing our guys, and they did a good job paying attention, and Jimmy was right where he's supposed to be."

"We practiced for that over and over in practice," Smith said. "We knew they were going to run some kind of fake to try to get some easy points. We knew it was coming."

Said Pelini: "I would have been kicking myself for a long time because if we didn't win the football game, I would have taken responsibility because I felt the game changed when I made that call," Pelini said. "I'm a grown man and I made a mistake."

Smith's touchdown made it 24-24 at halftime.

Several Buffs said they suspected when Henery lined up to try a 57-yard field goal in the game's final moments, another fake was in the works. One wasn't.

While Pelini said the game changed on the fake call, Smith disagreed.

“If we won, yes,” Smith said. “Since we lost, it didn’t mean anything.”

Smith’s touchdown was his second. He scored one on an interception return against Nebraska in 2007.

MORE SPECIAL: CU kicker Aric Goodman hit a 37-yard field goal. He finishes the year 5-for-14. After missing eight in a row, he made his final two.

Returner Josh Smith had a career-best 245 all-purpose yards Friday, including 193 on kickoff returns and 52 receiving. His 1,987 all purpose yards in 2008 are the second-most in program history, behind Rashaan Salaam’s 2,349 in 1994, the year he won the Heisman Trophy.

Smith also set program records for most kickoff returns (50) and kickoff-return yards (1,275).

INJURY REPORT: The only injury CU reported was a concussion linebacker Shaun Mohler suffered.

Hawkins said guard Blake Behrens, who limped off the field in the first quarter but returned, could “barely move” by game’s end. CU did not report his injury.

EXTRA POINTS: CU’s loss leaves the Big 12 with only seven bowl-eligible teams. If two go to BCS bowls, the league will fail to fill two of its slots. ... Demetrius Sumler ran nine times for 65 yards and two touchdowns. It was the second time in his career he’s scored multiple touchdowns. ... Darrell Scott carried two times for minus-1 yard. ... Nebraska ran 77 plays to CU’s 48. It gained 407 yards to CU’s 291. The Buffs gained 148 yards on their first four plays.

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

Rocky Mountain News

57-yard field goal, interception give Huskers win over Buffs

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

Published November 28, 2008 at 4:35 p.m.



Photo by Chris Schneider / Rocky Mountain New

Nebraska celebrates after Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins, left, threw an interception that was run back 30 yards for a touchdown by Ndamukong Suh with 55 seconds to play Friday at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln. Hawkins was trying to rally CU after Nebraska went ahead 33-31 on a 57-yard Alex Henery field goal.

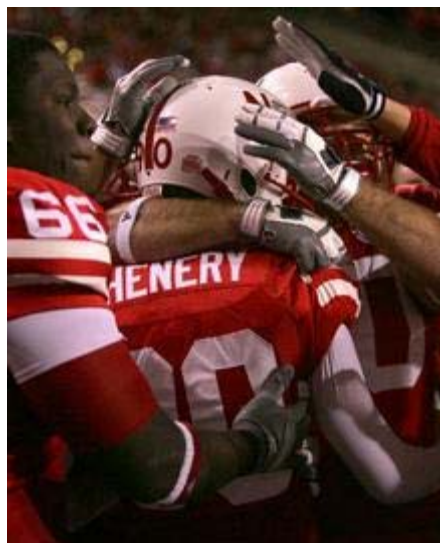


Photo by By Chris Schneider / The Rocky

Nebraska kicker Alex Henery is greeted by teammates after his 57-yard field goal. During a timeout, Henery had to convince his coach, Bo Pelini, that he could make a kick of that distance before getting the opportunity.

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Rocky Mountain News



By Chris Schneider / The Rocky/By Chris Schneider / The Rocky

Colorado tight end Riar Geer scores a touchdown on a 68-yard Cody Hawkins pass in the first minute of the game against Nebraska on Friday. The Buffs scored on their next drive as well to open up an early 14-0 lead.

LINCOLN, Neb. — All season, coach Dan Hawkins had preached the benefits of starting fast to his young University of Colorado football team.

So the Buffaloes, winless on the road in 2008, opened with a bang, followed shortly by another, here Friday against heavily favored Nebraska.

But owning the first 4 1/2 minutes in red and raucous Memorial Stadium didn't compare to what the Cornhuskers were saving for a final 103 seconds packed with heartbreak for the Buffs.

Parlaying a stadium-record field goal and a ground-shaking interception return for a

touchdown by a 300- pound defensive tackle into a 40-31 victory, Nebraska denied CU a sixth victory needed for bowl eligibility and put the Buffs (5-7 overall, 2-6 Big 12 Conference) home for the holidays.

Hawkins was proud of them anyway - maybe even beyond proud.

"I don't think I've ever been more proud of one of our teams," he said. "Our guys battled, scrapped, gave it everything they had - not an inch left . . . those guys, nothing but guts. They laid it out there."

So did Nebraska sophomore Alex Henery, whose 16 points Friday afternoon included a stadium-record 57- yard field goal that pushed the Cornhuskers ahead 33-31 with 1:43 to play.

Henery's longest previous successful kick was a 48-yarder against Virginia Tech. He had missed attempts of 53 (vs. Texas Tech) and 52 (vs. Baylor) and admitted after the game Friday he "hadn't been hitting it that far in pregame . . . I don't remember watching (the kick) go through at all, but I was pretty sure I made it."

He did, with maybe 2 yards to spare, but in the timeout called by Nebraska before the attempt, coach Bo Pelini wanted some assurance from his kicker before he sent him back onto the field.

"I just wanted him to look me in the face and tell me he felt he had it in him," Pelini said. "He kind of looked at it . . . normally his range is around 52 (yards)."

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Rocky Mountain News

Henery trotted back out, but the Buffs - they huddled on the sideline in front of their bench before the kick and talked about "finishing together," said tailback Demetrius Sumler - were surprised Henery was given the green light to try it.

"I didn't think they were going to . . . it was a 57 yards," said CU freshman safety Patrick Mahnke, who played the second half with a shoulder separation but nevertheless sacked Nebraska quarterback Joe Ganz for a 15-yard loss on third down that pushed Henery's attempt to that distance.

Henery's kick - it was the last of four (35, 27, 37, 57 yards) for the day - surpassed the previous Memorial Stadium record of 55 yards, set by Chris Drennan in 1989 against Northern Illinois. That also was the most recent field goal of at least 50 yards by a Nebraska kicker at home.

"The kid stepped up and made a huge kick, and that's the nature of it," Hawkins said. "You've got to tip your hat to a guy like that. He made a big play, (but) our guys battled."

The battle, and a war in which CU scored its most points this season in a Big 12 game, ended with 55 seconds left.

Gargantuan Ndamukong Suh gathered in a tipped Cody Hawkins pass and turned it into a 30-yard scoring run that put the game out of reach for the Buffs, who are left as postseason spectators for the second time in Hawkins' three-year tenure.

"It hurts . . . the seniors are crying in there, the young guys are sad because we're not going (to a bowl game)," said sophomore CU cornerback Jimmy Smith, whose heady play on a badly botched Nebraska fake field-goal attempt resulted in a 58-yard touchdown run that helped tie the score at 24-24 just before halftime.

Smith's touchdown was CU's first since its opening two possessions, when Hawkins and tight end Riar Geer teamed for a 68-yard touchdown and Sumler ran 36 yards for a score on the Buffs' next series.

Want a fast start?

Consider: CU used four plays and 92 seconds for its first two touchdowns, and a mass murmur spread among the mostly red-clad 85,319 - Nebraska's fifth-largest crowd ever and the 297th consecutive sellout, an NCAA record.

"It just showed we could make plays," Sumler said. "Coach 'Hawk' has talked to us about starting fast all season . . . we did, and it gave us some momentum."

But Nebraska, finishing its first season under Pelini at 8-4 (5-3 Big 12) and possibly in line for a Gator Bowl bid, surged back from its 14-0 deficit and went ahead 17-14.

CU tied the score at 17-17 on a 37-yard field goal by Aric Goodman, who finished the season 2-for-3 on field-goal attempts in his last two games after he suffered through an 0-for-8 stretch.

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Nebraska took a 27-24 lead after halftime, but CU answered to go ahead 31- 27 on Sumler's second scoring run (a 4-yarder). Then, the Cornhuskers looked to Henery for their next six points - his 37- and 57-yard kicks that pushed Nebraska ahead 33-31.

After the record setter, the Buffs got possession at their 21-yard line with 1:37 remaining. They gained 12 yards before Hawkins' pass was tipped by 6- foot-7 defensive end Zach Potter, then the ball was gathered in by Suh, who stiff-armed and stepped over a diving Hawkins en route to the end zone.

It was a loss, and Dan Hawkins was reluctant to acknowledge the game Friday was CU's best this season: "It's hard to say. . . . Clearly, just in terms of where we're at and all that, I think they just continue to show tremendous resolve.

"I'm really proud of our coaches and our guys for how positive they stayed (throughout an injury-marred season). . . . Even when no one gives you a chance, you've got a chance."

But the Buffs must wait until 2009 for their next one.

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