



Bufs will huddle up more

Depth at running back, offensive line leads to shift

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — Nothing is set in stone and probably never will be when it comes to offensive execution in Dan Hawkins' football program.

But this much is certain. More changes are coming for the Bufs in 2009 and they will begin in spring practices, which kick off March 31.

CU coaches have had multiple discussions since the season ended about the best offensive approach to use and what suits existing and incoming personnel best.

It will be an on-going conversation through spring drills and into the summer but the Bufs are likely going to huddle more next fall and return to using multiple personnel groupings.

"I think in general our offensive staff kind of thinks in terms of multiple formations, motion, downhill run game, whether it's two tight ends, play action and all those kinds of things," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said. "That lends itself a little bit more to being a huddle team."

Offenses have evolved to a faster pace with more passing and less huddling in recent years in college football.

It might be most evident in the Big 12, where teams such as Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas have competed on a national stage the past two seasons perfecting the up-tempo model.

Oklahoma set a record for points scored in one season in 2008, putting together five consecutive games with 60 or more points during one stretch and scoring 50 or more nine times.

Colorado gave it a whirl last year beginning in spring practices when the offense operated almost exclusively out of the shotgun and rarely huddled.

It carried over into training camp and the early part of the season, but coaches began to revert back to personnel groupings and huddles toward the end of the campaign when injuries had overtaken the team and forced too many young players into action.

Helfrich said the no-huddle approach isn't gone for good at CU, but the lessons learned in 2008 have coaches believing a different approach is probably best.

"I think we still want to have, and will have, the capability to do it and just kind of pick and choose some parts of when we will implement that," Helfrich said.

Dan Hawkins' coached teams always have run and thrown equally and all indications are Hawkins still believes in that balanced model.

With a healthy and more experienced offensive line next season and running backs such as Darrell Scott, Demetrius Sumler, Brian Lockridge and Rodney Stewart, it makes sense the program would play more to its strength and run the ball and set up the pass on the ground.

That could also take some of the burden off younger quarterbacks such as sophomores Tyler Hansen and Matt Ballenger and true freshman Clark Evans when it comes to being able to lead the team.

Those players figure to give junior Cody Hawkins all he can handle in battling for the starting job in the spring and summer.

Hawkins is a two-year starter, who split playing time in some games last season with Hansen, who actually made on start.

"The no-huddle was good," Lockridge said. "They loved it and we loved it as well, but I think we're going to do a mixture of both now instead of just all no-huddle.

"When we get in the huddle, it allows us to talk to each other and say like, 'OK, this guy is doing this. So you do this real quick.' We can motivate each other in the huddle as well. Mixing it up will probably help things out."

Helfrich said his job is simple. He has to put his players in the best position possible based on the talents. Depending totally on an approach like the no-huddle doesn't necessarily do that for everyone involved in the CU attack.

"We need to score more points, bottom line," Helfrich said.



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