



CU quarterbacks ready for more under Kiesau

Hawkins, Hansen expect added responsibility

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — Colorado quarterbacks Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen both expect to be much more involved with developing offensive game plans next season after their initial discussions with new offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau.

Coach Dan Hawkins promoted Kiesau from wide receivers coach to coordinator last week after former offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich left CU to take the same job at Oregon.

Cody Hawkins and Hansen said they had solid relationships with Kiesau before his promotion. Hawkins, whose father is the head coach, characterized his relationship with Kiesau as "the most father-like" as any coach on the staff. Hansen said he became close with Kiesau during the recruiting process, when Kiesau was the one to call him one day and offer him a scholarship to Colorado.

Both quarterbacks said they were sorry to see Helfrich leave Boulder, but they couldn't have picked a better replacement than Kiesau, whom they described as open-minded with "a magnetic personality."

"He brings kind of a new coaching style, which is kind of nice some times because you get so used to one guy you kind of want to change it up a little bit," Hansen said. "Sometimes it's good for you."

Hawkins, a two-year starter who is fighting Hansen desperately to keep his job, said the day after Kiesau was hired, he spent more than two hours in his newcoach's office talking about the future of the offense. Hawkins then went to class and came back later in the morning for several more hours of discussion.

"I've always had a great relationship with coach Kiesau, and that's one thing that I think is one of his greatest qualities as a coach is that he has always been a guy who goes out of his way to show he cares about you as a person and as an athlete," Hawkins said.

"He's always been somebody who is approachable, whether you're an offensive lineman, a quarterback, a wide receiver or even a defensive player. Everybody has taken to coach Kiesau really well. I'm sure if you were to take a poll of everybody's favorite coach on the staff, coach Kiesau would be at the top of the list."

Changing offensive coordinator after spring practices have ended means there likely won't be major changes in the offense for fall camp. Both quarterbacks confirmed they expect much of what the team practices this spring to remain in place, especially the terminology, but they are expecting significant changes for the quarterbacks.

Kiesau, who came to CU three years ago from Cal, wants to utilize more personnel groups and a greater

variety of packages within the offense, putting each player in position to do what he does best when he's on the field. Hawkins and Hansen also expect more shifting and motion to be added and much greater load of responsibility for quarterbacks pre-snap.

"I like the things he's going to do with the offense," Hansen said. "He has some things he's going to use from Jeff Tedford when he was at Cal. Some of the things that I really like doing."

Hawkins said he is excited about having more input with the game plan this fall, especially if he earns the starting job, but he also understands he will have more responsibility under Kiesau.

"It's going to be probably a bigger mental load on the quarterbacks pre-snap but much smaller post-snap," Hawkins said. "We'll come up to the line with probably about two run plays every time you're calling a run play, and we'll have an opportunity to check runs every time we're calling a run."

"As far as pass plays, depending on what defense we get, will be a little bit more elaborate in theory, but post-snap it will be much more direct. The quarterbacks will have to spend more time before game day getting ready, but once you get to game day, I think it's going to be much more simplified post-snap."

Notable

Hansen underwent surgery the day after the spring game to repair a broken thumb. Doctors inserted two pins that will remain in his thumb permanently, and he should be able to throw in seven-on-seven work by mid-June at the latest. Hansen left for California this week and said the thumb was already beginning to feel better. He plans to visit the Pro Football Hall of Fame later this month in Canton, Ohio, while in the Midwest to watch his older brother compete in track and field. Hawkins is spending some time in the Boise this month where his sister was expecting to give birth this week to his nephew, making coach Hawkins and grandfather for the first time. Most of the Buffs expect to return to campus for summer school and summer workouts June 1.



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Woelk: Kiesau might be just what Buffs need

By Neill Woelk

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BOULDER, Colo. — It's been interesting to follow the reaction of Buff fans concerning the departure of offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich.

Helfrich had his fair share of critics during his stay at Colorado -- nothing new for any coordinator, particularly with a team that's been struggling. (It's also interesting that some of those same critics who wanted him gone are now criticizing him for being disloyal to the program. Umm ... huh?)

Anyway, I would have liked to have seen how the Buff offense might have evolved with Helfrich at the controls for another year or two. While the end results were lacking up to this point, I honestly think the offense was -- make that is -- ready to take some huge strides next fall.

Certainly, the timing of Helfrich's departure, after spring ball was completed, is not good. But I do believe we'll see new coordinator Eric Kiesau not only keep the offense headed in right direction next fall, but maybe even give it a little extra boost. It might be a case of a new direction at just the right moment.

An offensive coordinator is judged by numbers, but fact is, Helfrich never had a full quiver of weapons to help produce the kinds of numbers that turn heads. Given the talent available, he did a pretty good job -- good enough, anyway, to make him appealing to a perennial Top 25 program. Next fall's Buffs will be the most talented group yet in the Dan Hawkins era, and I think folks would have been pleased with what Helfrich would have produced.

Helfrich reminded me of another young Colorado offensive coordinator, Shawn Watson, also the recipient of a fair amount of grief during his tenure in Boulder (including some from this corner).

But in retrospect, Watson did an admirable job here.

He won 10 games and a Big 12 championship with a terrific running game and a serviceable quarterback (Bob Pesavento) in 2001. A year later, he won nine games with a solid running game and Robert Hodge as his quarterback.

Then, when CU's running backs disappeared, Watson developed a passing game that made a record-setter out of a walk-on quarterback (Joel Klatt), and he kept CU's offense at a relatively competitive level.

Not bad.

Maybe the biggest complaint I had with Watson -- and, to a degree, with Helfrich -- is that at times they both suffered from the affliction that strikes many young offensive coordinators: the tendency to want to prove they can outsmart the opposition.

Too often, young coordinators seem determined to prove just how clever they can be, and they end up outsmarting themselves. It's a combination of too many trips to the bag of trick plays and not enough basic football in key situations.

It's an inclination that seems to disappear as those young coordinators gain experience. Anyone who has watched Watson the last few years at Nebraska has to be impressed with what he's done, particularly given the talent he's had to work with. He's helped the Huskers rediscover an offensive identity, and they appear to be on solid footing.

I have a feeling Helfrich will have a similarly successful transition at Oregon.

As for the Buffs, Hawkins was extremely lucky to have a guy like Kiesau already on staff. When CU announced his promotion, Kiesau told the Camera that he wanted to bring "shades" of Cal's Jeff Tedford and Boise State's Chris Petersen to his offense.

Those are two great offensive minds from which to draw.

No doubt, we'll see some tweaks in the offense next fall -- some that will be fairly dramatic and some that will be subtle.

Kiesau has had the benefit of watching CU's offense closely for the last three years. He knows the personnel, he knows the strengths and weaknesses -- and if he can indeed channel a little of Tedford and Petersen to the Buffs, it could very well be an improved product.

Best-case scenario? That offense we saw just getting ready to blossom in the spring could be in full bloom next fall -- especially if Kiesau sticks to the basics when necessary.



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