



Backup QBs plan to make push to start

Nelson, Ballenger respect Cody Hawkins, but nothing being conceded heading into 2008

By Ryan Thorburn
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Cody Hawkins has been guaranteed nothing at the family dinner table or inside the film room.

But teammates, fans and members of the media expect the redshirt freshman to be Colorado's starting quarterback through the 2010 season.

The Buffs have experienced some unbelievable highs (the upset of Oklahoma) and some painful lows (losing to Iowa State last Saturday) this fall with Hawkins running the offense.

And Hawkins' statistics mirror that up-and-down ride as he enters the final regular season game against Nebraska next Friday having completed 56.2 percent of his passes for 2,452 yards with 17 touchdowns and 15 interceptions.

To their credit, two of Hawkins' biggest fans are backup Nick Nelson, who has thrown a total of six passes since getting beaten out for the job in August, and Matt Ballenger, a smooth 6-5 freshman who has been running the scout team offense.

CU head coach Dan Hawkins, who you may have heard by now is also Cody's father, has promised his players that all of the starting jobs will be open for competition again before every season.

Even if the program is headed in a more positive direction with his son under center.

"You've just got to start right back at the beginning," Nelson said when asked about his approach to spring drills. "I've just to go out and do what I've been doing all along: push Cody and make him better, if he's going to be the guy. I've always got to be there. You've got to have a second guy just in case. I've always got to be prepared and I'm ready to do that."

Ballenger, who has enjoyed trying to channel everyone from Caleb Hanie (Colorado State) to Chase Daniel (Missouri) in practice, sounds like someone who would like to become the next starting quarterback for CU.

"I'm going to approach it as if I was going into the spring as the starter," Ballenger said. "I'm going to try to learn the offense more than I already know it. I'm going to get with Cody and learn from Cody and get with (offensive coordinator Mark) Helfrich."

The Buffs would love nothing more than to beat Nebraska to finish 6-6 and sneak into a bowl game. That would be a nice reward after suffering through a 2-10 season in Dan Hawkins' first year on the job.

And the extra game would also mean extra practices, which would benefit younger players like Ballenger.

"I think that would help me a ton," said Ballenger, who has had his share of practice highlights this season against the first-team defense. "Because I don't think we'll always be with the scout team. I think I'll be around Helfrich a lot and running our offense even more."

Nelson, a junior college transfer, understands more than anyone what Cody Hawkins has gone through this season. Watching his friend experience the highs and lows of the position has been difficult.

"You feel helpless," Nelson said. "I don't know the words for it. I feel like I could do more to help him. And not necessarily just him, but the team in general. We've got a great team and we've just been a little bit unlucky and made a couple of mental mistakes in clutch situations that have hurt us."

Some of the mistakes are the kind you would expect a freshman quarterback to make.

"Cody is a really good friend of mine. So I've been there through the ups and downs with him," Ballenger said. "He's had a good season and he's only a freshman. Everybody's acting like he's a senior. He's a great player."

The Buffs have received a verbal commitment from Tyler Hansen, a 6-1 quarterback from Temecula, Calif., who will join the competition next summer. The coaching staff has also offered a scholarship to highly touted prospect Matt Barkley of Santa Ana, Calif., who is also being recruited by the likes of USC, Tennessee and Florida State.

Drew potentially a CU walk-on

CU coach Dan Hawkins said it is possible his younger son, Drew, could join the CU program as a walk-on next summer.

Drew is the starting quarterback at Holy Family High School and is one of the best players in the state in the 2A classification. Hawkins said his son has received some attention in the recruiting process from Boise State, Wyoming and Valdosta State in Georgia.

Hawkins said Drew wouldn't necessarily play quarterback at the college level. He said he could see him playing wide receiver or safety after making use of a few years in a strength and conditioning program. He is 6-foot-2 and 174 pounds now.

Hawkins said he isn't even sure his son wants to play college football. Drew Hawkins plays the guitar and has some artistic talents that he could choose to pursue.

"Of all my kids, and I've said this before, he has more talent across everything than any of them," Hawkins said. "I mean, he's a good athlete. He's a good musician. ... He can do a lot of things. He'll catch fire with something here one of these days."

Read more about Drew Hawkins on the Buffzone blog at [Buffzone.com](http://www.buffzone.com).

Kyle Ringo contributed to this report



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