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cu football

Shreveport coveted stop for Buffaloes

Independence Bowl invites Colorado, Alabama and matches Hawkins vs. Saban

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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On a national scale, mid-level bowls can almost get lost amid all the BCS chatter, but Colorado coach Dan Hawkins and Alabama's Nick Saban say the 2007 Independence Bowl could become a key step in developing their programs.

Colorado and Alabama accepted invitations Sunday to the game in Shreveport, La. It will be televised nationally by ESPN, with a 6 p.m. MST kickoff.

The Independence Bowl is the only college football game scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 30. That's the NFL's final regular-season weekend.

"The exposure you get in bowl games is always a positive for building a program," said Saban, who has been out recruiting, as has Hawkins. "And the extra practices are important."

Returning to the college game last winter after two years coaching the Miami Dolphins, Saban went 6-6 overall and 4-4 in the

College Football

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Southeastern Conference. Hawkins, in his second year at Colorado, also went 6-6, with an up-and-down 4-4 slate in the Big 12.

"We're fired up," Hawkins said of facing Alabama. "They obviously have a great program, great coach, great tradition. Colorado has had its share of tradition as well. It's a marquee matchup that way."

Saban was able to see film of Colorado's 16-6 loss to Florida State because Alabama also played the Seminoles (a 21-14 loss at FSU). "We have a lot of respect for the way Colorado played in that game," Saban said.

Colorado and Alabama have met twice previously. CU defeated the Crimson Tide 47-33 in the 1969 Liberty Bowl. Alabama beat CU 30-25 in the 1991 Blockbuster Bowl.

"(Colorado and Alabama) are both kind of at similar junctures right now, rebuilding for the future," said CU senior defensive end Alonzo Barrett, who was born in Aurora but played his final three years of high school football in the Birmingham, Ala., area. "I am excited to be

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Bufs accept invite to play Alabama in Independence Bowl

By B.G. Brooks

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BOULDER – Dan Hawkins and most of his players were in agreement Sunday on wanting to face “the best possible opponent” in whatever bowl game selected the Colorado Buffaloes.

Their wish might have been granted.

As had been speculated, CU landed in the Independence Bowl (Shreveport, La., Dec. 30, 6 p.m. MST, ESPN) paired against tradition-rich Alabama of the Southeastern Conference.

“It’s always fun to play the best possible opponent, just because it’s a bowl game and you can assess your team and see how far you’ve come, what you can go out and do when you play a really high quality opponent,” redshirt freshman quarterback Cody Hawkins said.

“But I just think the guys are so happy because we’ve got a chance to go out and play another game. We’re going to be with each other a lot more. I mean, other than practice, we never have this whole cohesive group of guys together in one place.”

For freshman offensive tackle Ryan Miller, though, lining up against anyone in the postseason is preferable to the alternative – sitting at home.

“To me it doesn’t matter who we play,” he said. “I mean, we made it to a bowl game and we plan to win that bowl game. To me, no matter if we play a JUCO or an NFL team, it’s going to be a good experience.”

Independence Bowl chairman Joe Darwin said his bowl allots 12,000 tickets per school and both teams are expected to arrive in Shreveport on Dec. 26. Darwin said Alabama has an “appealing tradition locally” and the matchup with CU offers national intrigue. The bowl’s payout per team is about \$1.1 million.

Alabama, whose 55 postseason appearances is an NCAA record, and CU have played twice previously in bowl games. The Buffs defeated the Crimson Tide 47-33 in the 1969 Liberty Bowl, but they lost the 1991 Blockbuster Bowl 30-25 to the Tide.

While this will be CU’s first trip to the Independence Bowl, Alabama has made two previous appearances, most recently last season in a 34-31 loss against Oklahoma State. The Crimson Tide’s first trip to the event, first played in 1976, was in 2001 against Iowa State (Alabama won 14-13).

Dan Hawkins said CU is “fired up” to be playing “one of greatest programs in the history of college football (and) Nick Saban is one of the best coaches.” Saban, in his first season as Alabama’s coach, and Hawkins don’t have a history, but Saban said he respects what Hawkins has accomplished in two seasons at CU.

He specifically mentioned the Buffs’ near-miss (a 14-13 loss) at Georgia last season, noting he knows firsthand the difficulty of playing the Bulldogs in Athens, Ga.

College football’s highest paid coach (\$4 million annually), Saban said his team will not begin bowl work for another two weeks, allowing him and his coaches to concentrate on recruiting during that period.

The Buffs began bowl preparations over the weekend, with practices Saturday and Sunday. Their schedule calls for work to resume this coming Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

CU and Alabama finished this season with 6-6 overall records and 4-4 conference marks. They lost to one common opponent – Florida State. The Seminoles defeated the Buffs 16-6 in Boulder on Sept. 15, then beat the Crimson Tide 21-14 two weeks later in Jacksonville, Fla.

But while CU put an upbeat touch on the regular season, defeating Nebraska 65-51, Alabama lost its final four games, including a 17-10 defeat against rival Auburn in the annual Iron Bowl.

Saban, an assistant at Michigan State in 1995 when the Spartans played another of his former teams, Louisiana State, in the Independence Bowl, said this year's game offers him, his staff and players "a great opportunity . . . to change the tide of how the season ended (and) go out on a winning note."

He said the four-game losing streak, which included Alabama's first loss to a Sun Belt Conference team (Louisiana-Monroe), was brought on by "some discipline issues" and injuries "that also made us a different team. It affected our confidence (and) we didn't do a good job of overcoming adversity.

"The key is how you respond. This team had a tough ending to the season. The real challenge is for us to be positive and upbeat."

CU's roster includes one player from Louisiana – freshman receiver Kendrick Celestine, of Mamou – and one player from Alabama – senior defensive end Alonzo Barrett, of Alabaster.

FOUR-STAR WEEKEND: CU's recruiting took a major step with the commitment of a pair of high-profile prospects. Inside linebacker Lynn Katoa, a 6-foot-2, 220-pounder from Salt Lake City's Cottonwood High School, and tight end Ryan Deehan, a 6-2, 228-pounder from Poway (Calif.) High School, told CU coaches they would sign with the Buffs. CU has 10 known 2008 commitments.

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Facing Tide suits the Buffaloes

SEC foe will be a good test in Independence

By B.G. Brooks

Monday, December 3, 2007

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Buff s accept bid to Independence Bowl

CU, Alabama to tussle in only bowl on Dec. 30

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

In the end, the Independence Bowl had no choice but to take the Colorado Buffaloes.

CU was the last eligible Big 12 team available for the Independence Bowl on Sunday when its turn to choose a program came. The conference landed two BCS teams, and every other bowl with whom the league has deals had selected others.

The 32nd installment of the Independence Bowl will be played Dec. 30 in Shreveport, La., and air on ESPN. It's the only bowl game being played that day.

Both programs receive a 12,000-ticket allotment to sell, beginning immediately. CU will depart for the site on Dec. 26. This is CU's first Independence Bowl, while Alabama lost to Oklahoma State in it last season.

"We're fired up," CU coach Dan Hawkins said Sunday night. "They are obviously one of the greatest programs in the history of college football, and Nick Saban is one of the beset coaches. This will be a huge test for us."

Saban, who left the NFL's Miami Dolphins a year ago for a \$4 million annual paycheck at Alabama, will be a big part of several plot lines that'll unfold before the game is played. Saban coached at LSU from 2000 to 2004, winning two SEC titles and a national championship in 2003. His return to Louisiana as the coach of Alabama, which is making its NCAA-best 55th bowl appearance, will capture attention. He is college football's highest paid coach.

While the Independence Bowl had no choice but to take CU, it selected Alabama over South Carolina, which was the only one of the Southeastern Conference's 10 bowl teams that will miss the postseason. Like CU, Alabama is 6-6, but the Crimson Tide lost its final four games, including bitter defeats to UL-Monroe and arch-rival Auburn.

"This team had a tough ending to the season," Saban said. "It's a real challenge for all of us to be positive and upbeat about the team we have right now."

Still, the Independence Bowl liked the CU-Alabama matchup.

"There's a tradition with Alabama that was very appealing locally," chairman Joe Darwin said. "Then looking at Colorado and the matchup on the field, not only from standpoint of the stands but the TV standpoint with television partner ESPN, we felt like that matchup has some intrigue we needed to explore, and did."

"We came to the conclusion that Alabama and Colorado was a more intriguing matchup for our game."

CU and Alabama has split two previous bowls, beginning with the 1969 Liberty Bowl, which CU won, 47-33. Alabama beat the Buffs in the 1991 Blockbuster Bowl, 30-25, in Darian Hagan's final game as CU quarterback. The programs have never met in the regular season.



Colorado cornerback Jimmy Smith (3) and a handful of teammates celebrate an interception Smith returned for a touchdown against Nebraska on Nov. 23. The Buffs are hoping to have reason to celebrate on Dec. 30 when they play Alabama in the Independence Bowl. **Times-Call/Joshua Buck**

“How many times can you say you played Alabama?” CU guard Edwin Harrison said. “These are the kinds of things you really cherish and you tell your kids about.”

Hawkins called the chance to play in a bowl a big step in a program’s building process.

“Good teams play against good teams in the postseason,” Hawkins said. “I think that’s part of it.”

EXTRA POINTS: CU held a practice Sunday morning in the bubble that Hawkins called “really good.” ... The BCS Championship game will pit LSU against Ohio State on Jan. 7. Hawkins said he voted LSU and Big 12 champion Oklahoma at the top of his weekly poll. ... CU will return to practice Friday afternoon.

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

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playing them."

Footnotes Each school is responsible for an allotment of 12,000 tickets. Colorado has one player on its roster from Louisiana: freshman receiver Kendrick Celestine from Mamou. CU has never played in the Independence Bowl, which debuted in 1976. Alabama has made three appearances, including a 34-31 loss to Oklahoma State last year.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
tkensler@denverpost.com

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