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Complex offense under review

Plans streamlined for the young Buffs

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Big-play defense, such as Texas put on CU's Cody Hawkins, is becoming a standard for the Longhorns. (David Zalubowski, The Associated Press)

BOULDER — At the college level, offensive football coaches walk a fine line. They would love to hand out a playbook as thick as Webster's Dictionary, as complicated as Calculus II. But players also have regular classes to worry about. And the weight of all that information can be enough to confuse any 19-

year old.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins and offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich have spent the week considering whether they have given too much too soon to a fuzzy-cheeked offense that includes 14 players among its 22-man two-deep who are freshmen and sophomores. After last week's 38-14 loss to Texas, Helfrich lamented that his unit had two communication problems — "anxiety things" that Helfrich had not seen in his 12 years

Colorado Football

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of coaching.

Up next is a Saturday game at No. 16 Kansas (4-1, 1-0 Big 12) in Lawrence, with the Buffs (3-2, 0-1) needing to turn around their dismal offensive output of late to pull off an upset.

"We're in an ongoing process trying to figure out the changes we need to make, with having so many

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young guys," Helfrich said. "We're trying to build the confidence in what we're trying to do."

Simplifying the offense is likely, the coordinator said. But there are risks doing that, too.

"If you get too simple, you can become a little bit predictable," Helfrich said. "We're just trying to find the things our guys truly believe in. We need to find the things we can use against multiple opponents and have us at least appear 'all-purpose.'"

Something must change. CU has averaged 17.3 points in its past three games.

"It's just little things that are causing us to self-destruct," sophomore tailback Demetrius Sumler said. "It's a guy going the wrong way on one play or taking the wrong step on another play."

Sophomore quarterback Cody Hawkins said too many players have been having "brain locks" in competition. He does not exclude himself.

"It's just tough to get everybody to eliminate hiccups in a game," Cody said. "We just have so much we have to think about. Young guys might get mixed up. Especially with our offense, everybody has to be firing on all cylinders to execute the way we want to. We just have to keep getting better at it."

Dan Hawkins said spirits remain high, joking, "We haven't brought out the bamboo and started beating them across the back." After lopsided losses to Texas and Florida State the past two weeks, Hawkins devoted more time in practice to live drills this week.

This could be a swing game that determines which way the season goes for Colorado and whether it will be competitive in the Big 12 North.

"You never want to lose two in a row, let alone

three," Helfrich said. "It's a big game for us — just for our own pride and confidence, just turning things around a little bit."

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The Lowdown

By Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

COLORADO (3-2, 0-1)

Player to watch: QB Cody Hawkins.

Nobody is saying his starting job is in jeopardy. But the Buffaloes sophomore needs to break out of a two-game passing slump to convince everyone that he is the guy, rather than redshirt freshman Matt Ballenger, who is expected to get some snaps. More important, Hawkins needs to come up with some big plays if CU is going to end its offensive doldrums.

Key for Buffaloes: Keep a spy on Reesing.

Colorado's defense did something right against Kansas last year, holding the Jayhawks to 19 points, or 23 below their average. A big key was the play of CU's safeties and linebackers, who stayed alert for scrambles by quarterback Todd Reesing. CU coach Dan Hawkins calls them demoralizing "gashers."

KANSAS (4-1, 1-0)

Player to watch: RB Jake Sharp.

Pay too much attention to Reesing and Sharp, a 5-10, 190-pound junior, gets loose. Sharp, who hopes to own a fly-fishing shop in the Rocky Mountains, can run and catch, and he is much faster than he first appears. He led KU's comeback at Iowa State with 79 yards rushing and 107 yards receiving

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— the latter a school record for a running back.

Key for Jayhawks: Quick start.

Kansas dug out of a 20-0 halftime hole last weekend in a 35-33 win at Iowa State, but Jayhawks coach Mark Mangino doesn't want to make that uphill climb again. "The teams we play the rest of the year, we can't spot them points like that," Mangino said. "We can't come out and basically be nonexistent on offense for an entire half."

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Rocky Mountain News

CU report: Reviews favor Kansas defense

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

Published October 9, 2008 at 9:18 p.m.



Orlin Wagner / Associated Press/2007

Kansas linebacker Mike Rivera, right, will provide a stern challenge Saturday for the University of Colorado offense.



Rich Abrahamson / Associated Press

CSU's Rashaun Greer catches a pass Saturday.

Kansas ranks among the top four in three of the four major defensive categories (total, scoring and rushing) in the Big 12 Conference, and Colorado quarterback **Cody Hawkins** has ascertained this much about the Jayhawks' success:

"You can tell those guys spend a lot of time in the film room . . . studying exactly what their assignments are. That's a defense that executes well. You really have to take what they give you; you can't really impose your will on them.

"If you take care of the ball and take what they give you, that's the key to success against them."

From his time in the film room, CU freshman tailback **Darrell Scott** has seen enough to observe, Kansas' "No. 40 is a superman."

That would be **Mike Rivera**, who teams with **James Holt** and **Joe Mortensen** to form a linebacking corps Buffaloes coaches call the strength of the Jayhawks defense.

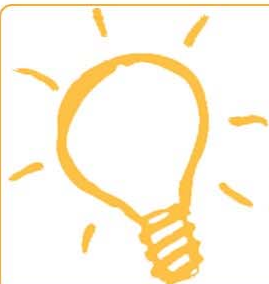
Holt and Mortensen each have made a team-best 32 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss and three sacks between them.

Rivera has made 22 tackles, three tackles for loss and has one sack.

Switch at corner?

Jimmy Smith, who was hampered in the season's first three weeks by back problems, logged more snaps against Texas than starting right

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Rocky Mountain News

cornerback **Gardner McKay**

Secondary coach **Greg Brown** said the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Smith, the Buffs' biggest corner, is challenging to supplant McKay in the starting lineup.

Brown also said progress made by sophomore **Jalil Brown** has been significant.

Scott update

Scott participated in only two offensive plays against Texas before spraining an ankle.

CU lists him as day to day this week, but he says his rehabilitation work has gone well and he expects to play Saturday.

Scott said he continues to "get better all around . . . my footwork, technique, watching film, everything."

Before Saturday's game, he said he finally had recuperated from knee and groin injuries that slowed him for the first four games.

Up to speed, almost

Receiver/return specialist **Jason Espinoza** finally is ready to play after suffering a broken collarbone in preseason camp. All he's lacking, he said, is to be in tip-top shape.

"They wouldn't let me run (while the collarbone mended)," he said. "The most I could do was ride a bike. . . . I just need to get back in the swing of

things and get some technique back.

"It's been a little over two months since I ran a route, but it'll come back."

Josh Smith will continue as the No. 1 punt returner, but Espinoza is running with a second receivers grouping.

He said it

"No matter what anybody says about everything else going on, just being directly on point with everything (is important). Communication is a big part of that, also taking care of the football."

Hawkins, on how his play can improve.

Numbers game

turnover margin through five games for CU. The Buffs have lost 10 turnovers and gotten the same number, ranking them No. 9 in that category in the Big 12 Conference.

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