



# QB switch not a quick fix

## CU's Hawkins shares philosophy for considering changes

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Plenty of Colorado football fans have convinced themselves the woes of their offense are a one-man issue. Borrowing a few campaign posters from Sen. Barack Obama and taping backup quarterback Matt Ballenger's name just above the phrase "Change we need" would suit them perfectly.

Others have convinced themselves a switch at the position is inevitable this season and might be better suited to using Ballenger's name with Sen. John McCain's slogan "Change is coming."

Dan Hawkins and his assistant coaches appear to disagree on both counts. Hawkins offered some valuable insight into his philosophy behind making a quarterback change during his weekly media luncheon Tuesday afternoon at the Dal Ward Center.

"It's always a tenuous situation," Hawkins said. "Confidence and continuity is such a huge, huge thing. If you truly are in a position where you're going to give a guy the hook, I think you better be prepared to say, 'OK, we're going to go with a change and we're good making that change.' Because it's very hard to get them back up. It really is."

Hawkins has been critical of his son's play as the Buffs' starting quarterback in recent weeks, but he definitely doesn't believe the Buffs' offensive problems would all be solved by changing quarterbacks.

CU is in the midst of the three-game losing streak in which the Buffs have averaged 16.3 points a game. Much of those struggles can be traced to upheaval in the offensive line with two season-ending injuries calling even less experienced players into service and those players having to get up to speed against very good defenses.

Cody Hawkins' struggles have come against three of the nation's top-30 defenses. He has made some crucial blunders and has completed only 42 percent of 91 passing attempts with three interceptions. But the running game also has faltered, making the Buffs more one-dimensional than they were in the first three games this season.

Coaches have replaced Hawkins in the lineup late in the two most recent losses, to Texas and Kansas, with Ballenger, who hasn't appeared to be confident in either instance but has done well in the time he has been given.

Ballenger has completed eight of 12 passes for 118 yards and a touchdown, albeit against defenses that were not blitzing and playing coverages designed to keep the ball in front of them and not give up big plays.

Coach Hawkins said making a change at quarterback is a delicate matter that has to be handled right and done for the right reasons.

"I think you have to be fair with them. I think you have to be honest with them," he said. "I think there has to be real tangible reasons as you look at the entire package and kind of go, 'We have to do this.'

"I think if you're a little trigger happy ... if you resort to emotion, that you sometimes have an issue where it may not be all that guy's fault. You just kind of feel like emotionally that's what you should do even though there is not a lot of tangible evidence there that says, 'Yeah this is all on you' "

While Hawkins is hesitant to further complicate the issue and doesn't want to lay the blame for the team's struggles all at the feet of his starter, there is a school of thought that says a change can lead to good things, even for the quarterback being replaced.

Joel Klatt understands both sides of it and has lived through tough times at the position. The former CU star will work his first college game this weekend as a member of the Fox Sports Net play-by-play team calling the Buffs' game against Kansas State.

Klatt holds most of Colorado's most significant passing records after serving as the team's starting quarterback during the 2003, 2004 and 2005 seasons. But there were tough times for Klatt, too.

The Buffs went through a similarly haggard stretch offensively in the first half of the 2004 season and former coach Gary Barnett chose to replace Klatt in the starting lineup with James Cox just before a meeting with Iowa State.

"I remember that week vividly, and it was a real perspective adjuster for me in terms of I was making football too important in my own life," Klatt said Tuesday at the Dal Ward Center. "I started to realize that.

"What it did is, it kind of re-energized my mind-frame when I would step in the building. It wasn't just about completing more passes or being more productive on the field, but rather kind of a whole change in terms of attitude, lifting, meetings. It was, for me, a time where for the first time I could focus on doing whatever I could do to help the team."

Cox started against the Cyclones, but threw an interception late in the first half and Barnett gave him the hook, turning back to Klatt.

"I can remember just being so much more appreciative of where I was at and the fact that I got to be in the huddle again and the fact that I got to run the offense again," Klatt said. "I just tried to do things within the offense. My perspective at that point was I didn't have to do anything, but, rather, the system would work for itself."



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## Role changes for Buff TE Geer

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

Midway through his junior season, Riar Geer appears to be a forgotten man in the Colorado passing game, at least when it comes to running routes and catching the ball.

A player who should be an asset working the middle of the field and a big target for quarterback Cody Hawkins is instead staying in to shore up pass blocking with an inexperienced offensive line.

Geer missed the first two games of the year recovering from minor knee surgery but has played in the past four contests. He has only caught three balls for 29 yards and a touchdown.

Geer said the tight end position is not as crucial to the offense this season as it was last year. The Buffs were much more of a power running team in 2007 and used more two-tight end formations than they do this year in a more finesse approach.

Geer said his role has changed as the oldest and strongest tight end on the roster. He is needed to help in blocking, particularly in the wake of two injuries to starting offensive linemen.

"I still feel like I'm a big part of the offense," Geer said. "I feel like I catch a lot of balls in practice, but it's a lot different in practice than it is in games.

"I feel like I'm open at times, but it's not like you get the ball on every play. For sure, I'd like to get the ball more, but I'm just doing whatever I can to help the team."

Tight ends coach Kent Riddle said Geer is the best blocker he has among his group of tight ends. Junior Patrick Devenny has done well as a receiver and has taken over more of the pass-catching duties with true freshman Ryan Deehan also getting some throws. But coaches still would like to get the ball to Geer more often.

"We actually had a couple plays designed for Riar last week, and they grabbed him on one and kept him from getting out," Riddle said.

Coach Dan Hawkins said Geer's contributions don't stand out on the stat sheet this year as they have in the past, especially in 2006, when he was the team's leading receiver. But Hawkins said Geer has shown more maturity in fulfilling every assignment than he ever has in his career.

### **Snap improved**

There have been small areas of improvement this season for the struggling CU offense. One of them is the shotgun snap.

The Buffs had multiple fumbles and negative-yardage plays last year because of poor shotgun snaps. They spent the majority of practice time in the spring and summer working out of the shotgun to fix the problem.

The team has been operating under center much more than it did during spring and fall camps, but Hawkins said the plan never was to operate exclusively in the shotgun. Coaches simply wanted to have players become more proficient in executing from that formation.

### **Beatty back**

Hawkins said it's good to have linebacker B.J. Beatty back in action after the sophomore missed part of training camp and much of the first half of the season with a hairline fracture in his leg.

Beatty played at Kansas last week and made an impact. Coaches believed Beatty would contribute much more this season coming out of spring ball when he was listed atop the depth chart at outside linebacker ahead of senior Brad Jones, who is having a solid senior season.

### **Notable**

Redshirt freshman Eugene Goree returned to offensive line in practice Tuesday and continues to be groomed for playing time there this season. Read the Buffzone blog online for more on Goree's switch to offense. ... Hawkins refused to label Saturday's game as a must-win or a more significant game when it comes to the Buffs' postseason hopes than any other this season. "You're scrapping to improve, you're scrapping to have a better season than last year, you're scrapping to get a bowl game," he said. "It's all of those things. The mountain only gets steeper. People lamented us letting the Iowa State game get away from us last year, and then we were able to beat Nebraska. So they're all going to be that way."



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# Woelk: Investing long term with Buffs still not bad idea

By Neill Woelk  
Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Somehow, I expected to see the Dal Ward Center in full panic mode Tuesday afternoon.

Coaches scurrying back and forth, players with frantic looks on their faces, a general buzz of alarm -- kind of like Wall Street over the last 10 days or so. Full-blown hysteria.

But there was neither panic nor manic surrounding Colorado football on Tuesday.

Dan Hawkins met with the media for his weekly press conference, answered all questions, chatted with reporters, refused to anoint this week's game against Kansas State as a make-or-break point of the season, and then went about his business.

In fact, that actually might be the best way to describe the mood around the Buffs: business as usual.

"Our mission has been every week to try to get better, to try to improve," Hawkins said.

Nothing has changed. While the sky may be falling on Internet chat rooms and message boards, nobody in Dal Ward is ducking for cover.

Issues? Of course there are issues. Show me a team in the nation that doesn't have some problems to address, and I'll show you an unbeaten team.

But if you're trying to decide whether to buy or sell these Buffs (just to carry that Wall Street analogy a little farther), you first have to decide how long you plan on investing.

If you're in it for just the rest of the season -- and you bought in after the Buffs started 3-0 -- that's an admittedly dicey proposition.

For a number of reasons, CU hasn't progressed like most had hoped thus far. The offense is struggling, the defense has had its moments (good and bad) and CU's special teams have been a roller-coaster ride, leaving fans breathless on one occasion and with that sinking feeling in the pit of their stomach the next.

That being said, Colorado is still 3-3 with six to go. That's plenty of time to build a little momentum, cure some problems and take some steam into the home stretch.

In some ways, the Buffs are at square one: half the season gone and nothing decided. There's a profit to be made, but it won't be easy.

But if you're looking at a long-term investment, you might want to weather this storm -- just like they have in Missouri, Kansas, Texas Tech and Oklahoma State.

The improvements at Kansas and Missouri have been well-chronicled. Those programs stuck with their coaches (Gary Pinkel at Mizzou and Mark Mangino at Kansas) through some lean years and they're reaping the benefits today.

Ditto with Texas Tech, where Mike Leach is in his ninth year and has his team ranked in top 10.

And did we mention Oklahoma State? When Les Miles headed off to LSU four years ago, OSU promoted Mike Gundy and stuck with him. Gundy went 4-7 in his first year (1-7 in the Big 12) and entered this year with an 18-19 overall record and an 8-16 mark in the Big 12.

But in his fourth year, Gundy owns a win over No. 3 Mizzou, an unbeaten record and a No. 8 ranking in the nation.

Lesson to be learned? Successful programs in the Big 12 all have one thing in common: continuity. Mack Brown is in his 11th year at Texas. Bob Stoops has been on the OU campus for 10. Then there's Texas Tech's Leach (9), Mizzou's Pinkel (8), KU's Mangino (7) and OSU's Gundy (4).

It takes time, it takes patience and it takes a little luck.

This corner has always been a believer in the "four-year barometer." After four years -- with any coach in any program in any sport -- ask yourself these questions:

Has that coach consistently recruited well?

Have those players improved after their arrival?

Is the team more competitive against upper-echelon teams?

And, naturally, has the record improved?

If you can answer yes to those questions, then your investment is a sound one.

Of course investors in the Buffs -- and it's the same in every corner of the college football world -- have little patience. They're demanding big profits, right now.

Not going to happen. Nobody with an objective outlook actually thought it would, not in Dan Hawkins' third year.

Short-term forecast? We think there's still some bump left in these Buffs, and this weekend's Kansas State game is the perfect time for a little bounce.

Overall, though, it will be a roller-coaster ride to the closing bell.

Meanwhile, if you don't have the patience for the long term, the Big 12 probably isn't the best place to be an investor.

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## Bufs need to win in the worst way

Hawkins won't call K-State game a "must win," but it seems the closest thing to one.

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 10/15/2008 12:03:37 AM MDT



CU has lost three games since beating West Virginia, but coach Dan Hawkins says the Buffs haven't forgotten how to win. Kansas State (4-2) visits Folsom Field this Saturday. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post )

BOULDER — Considering the strength of Big 12 football, this might not be a good year for a league member to go 6-6 and expect blazer-clad bowl representatives to be beating down the door.

When invitations are handed out in December, the Big 12's eight guaranteed bowl slots may not be enough to accommodate every bowl-eligible team.

Mired in a three-game losing skid, Colorado stands 3-3, including 0-2 in the conference. It's not hard to do the math. Opportunities to bolster the victory column are dwindling. Ultimately, Colorado's home

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game Saturday against Kansas State (4-2, 1-1) could prove to be make-or-break.

"This is definitely a big game for us," CU sophomore cornerback Jalil Brown said Tuesday. "This is almost a

## Colorado Football

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deciding point for our season. We definitely need a win to turn the season around and head it in a positive direction. We have talked (as a team) about how important the game is."

It's been almost a month since the shoulders of frenetic CU fans carried players off Folsom Field after the overtime victory over nationally ranked West Virginia. During his weekly media luncheon Tuesday, CU coach Dan Hawkins said the program has not forgotten how to win.

"We know what (winning) looks like; we know what it smells like," Hawkins said. "We know how to get there. We have to keep battling."

Colorado has dropped to last place in the conference in every major offensive category: scoring offense (22.5), total offense (310.2), rushing offense (114.8), passing offense (195.3) and pass efficiency (118.6).

"There's no doubt in my mind," Hawkins said, "that our kids and our coaches are doing everything they can to get them in the right spots, to create schemes, to create plays. So, we'll get there."

After Kansas State, the Buffs have consecutive road games against Missouri and Texas A&M. Then home games against Iowa State and Oklahoma State before the annual day-after-Thanksgiving battle with Nebraska, this time in Lincoln.

"All (games are important), they really are," Hawkins said, not biting on a question about whether Saturday's game rates in the "must win" category.

"You're scrapping to improve. You're scrapping to have a better season than last year. You're scrapping to get to a bowl game, all those things. The mountain always gets steeper."

## Footnotes.

Colorado coaches are working on "creative ways" to get tight ends and running backs more involved in the passing game, Hawkins said. CU's tight ends caught only two passes in the 30-14 loss at Kansas, both by junior Patrick Devenny. . . . Sophomore offensive tackle Ryan Miller, who underwent season-ending surgery Oct. 3 to repair a fibula fracture of his left leg, joked Tuesday that, while on crutches, he is building up the world's strongest triceps. "The toughest part is not being out there with the guys,"

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Miller said.

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college football

## Hawkins says Buffs are still alive

By Tom Kensler  
Denver Post Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 10/14/2008 04:08:52 PM MDT

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victory over nationally ranked West Virginia.

CU coach Dan Hawkins said Tuesday during his weekly media luncheon that the program has not forgotten how to win. The Buffaloes (3-3, 0-2 Big 12) are mired in a three-game losing streak.

"We know what (winning) looks like; we know what it smells like," Hawkins said. "We know how to get there. We have to keep battling."

Colorado has dropped to last place among Big 12 Conference football teams in every major offensive category. Those include scoring offense (22.5), total offense (310.2), rushing offense (114.8), passing offense (195.3) and pass efficiency (118.6).

The Buffaloes host Kansas State (4-2, 1-1) at 5 p.m. Saturday. FSN Rocky Mountain has the regional telecast.

"There's no doubt in my mind that our kids and our coaches are doing everything they can to get them in the right spots, to create schemes, to create plays; so we'll get there," Hawkins said.

Hawkins discounted any notion that Saturday's game is a "must win" for the Buffs. With six games remaining, Colorado needs three victories to become bowl eligible. Because there may not be enough Big 12 bowl slots to accommodate all of the league's bowl-eligible teams in this exceptionally strong year for the conference, CU might ultimately need a total of seven victories.

After playing Kansas State, the Buffs play at Missouri, at Texas A&M, at home against Iowa State, and at home against Oklahoma State before concluding the regular season with the annual day-after-Thanksgiving battle with Nebraska, this time in Lincoln.

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# Rocky Mountain News

## CU report: Pivotal Saturday looms

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

Published October 14, 2008 at 8:30 p.m.



Barry Gutierrez / The Rocky

CU quarterback Cody Hawkins, right, remains the starter and Matt Ballenger the backup despite the team's recent struggles.

**BOULDER** — They're trying to hold firm to the "every game is important" theme, but the Buffaloes know their season could hinge on Saturday's encounter with Kansas State.

"It's almost a deciding point for our season," sophomore defensive back **Jalil Brown** said Tuesday. "We definitely need a win to turn the season around in a positive direction. We've talked about it (as a team) a whole lot, talked about how important this game is."

CU's coaches, senior center **Daniel Sanders** said, have underscored the weight of Saturday's

game and the following five like this: "It's a one-game playoff every week, starting this week. We have to go, we have to keep ourselves above .500 and get things turned in the right direction."

After a three-game skid, CU is 3-3 overall and winless (0-2) in the Big 12 Conference. Three home and three road games remain, with six wins needed to become bowl eligible.

Yet senior safety **Ryan Walters** contends the postseason isn't foremost in his thoughts: "I'm concerned about playing the best we can play and improving, then letting the chips fall where they may. Our focus now is playing (well) every Saturday."

Coach **Dan Hawkins** termed each of the remaining six games as pivotal, noting, "You're scrapping to have a better season than last year, you're scrapping to get to a bowl game - all those things. The mountain only gets steeper."

### Explaining 'the hook'

Benching a starting quarterback can be a nightmarish issue, one to be done as a last resort and for irrefutable reasons, Hawkins said.

"If you truly are in a position where you're going to give a guy the hook, you better be prepared to say, 'OK, we're going to go with a change and we're good making (it),' " he said. "It's very hard to get (the deposed player) back up, it really is."

With "confidence and continuity" vital to the position, Hawkins said coaches need "real

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tangible reasons" before going to a backup:

"I think if you're a little trigger happy, if you resort just to emotion, you're going to have an issue where it's not all that guy's fault. It's never easy and it's very dicey. There are probably very few positions in all of sport that sit on such a small pinnacle of stability as the quarterback."

The coach said **Cody Hawkins'** backup, **Matt Ballenger**, will work this week as he did last - preparing to play but with no guarantees.

"The blueprint for those things is not always cut in stone," Dan Hawkins said.

Ballenger has played in each of the past two games, but Cody Hawkins remains the starter.

## Miller update

Sophomore offensive tackle **Ryan Miller** (broken left fibula) is on crutches and will be in a walking boot for another month. He said he was frustrated by the injury suffered in the Florida State game.

"You never think it could happen to you, then it does," he said. "I'm just trying to be supportive in any way I can."

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