



# Bufs tone down rivalry hype

By Kyle Ringo

Sunday, November 23, 2008

The red letters on the locker room schedule are gone. The scout team isn't covering its helmets with white tape or donning red jerseys. Players aren't breathing fire.

In fact, the atmosphere around the Colorado football team seems downright sedate.

If loud speakers weren't blaring the greatest hits of the Cornhusker marching band throughout practices, one would hardly know it's Nebraska week.

Coach Dan Hawkins has changed the way the Buffaloes approach their annual rivalry with Big Red.

Hawkins acknowledges it's a big game fans and alumni care deeply about winning, but he treats it no differently from any other game. He expects his players to do the same.

The Hawkins way flies in the face of how the Nebraska game has been treated in Boulder the past 20 years.

And the current players seem to like it.

"With the old staff, guys taped their helmets and everything, and it was a big hoopla," said senior George Hypolite, who was recruited to Boulder and played as a freshman for former coach Gary Barnett. "You really did everything to beat Nebraska."

"I think with our new coaching staff, the difference is you understand it's a rivalry game, but we play it as business as usual. I mean, it's much more about us now, than it is about Nebraska. Don't get me wrong. We still love beating Nebraska and it feels so special when you're out there on the field against them, but, at the same time, we don't put as much emphasis in the crummy rivalry things."

CU legend Bill McCartney built the Buffs into a national power 20 years ago by targeting the Cornhuskers. He fueled the emotion of the game year round by making it the only game on the schedule printed in red letters.

When Hypolite joined the program in 2005, Barnett invited McCartney to address the team the night before training camp opened.

McCartney told the Buffs he built the program on beating Nebraska and still considered it the ultimate test. He encouraged them to do the same.

"We're much more about our craft now," Hypolite said. "Nobody is David and nobody is Goliath. It's football and we just want to win a football game. It's less important to make it into something bigger

than football, when, in reality, it's about who has more points at the end of the game."

The Buffs travel to Lincoln, Neb., on Thanksgiving for Friday's game, and this year they have to come away with a victory to keep the season alive and qualify for a bowl game.

Safety Ryan Walters grew up around the CU program. His father, Marc, played quarterback for the Buffs in the 1980s under McCartney. Perhaps, no other current player has as much dislike for Nebraska as Walters because he was raised with it.

When Walters first joined the program in 2004 as a freshman from Aurora, he redshirted that season and was one of the players on the scout team during Nebraska week who came to practice each day dressed like the enemy. The fire in the eyes of older teammates told him all he needed to know about the passion within the game.

There have been times in the past when that passion has fueled big wins, but also instances when it has led to big meltdowns.

The final Nebraska game of Barnett's tenure in 2005 is a prime example.

The Buffs performed better during a pregame trash talking session at midfield involving the entire teams, than they did in the 30-3 loss that ended with an entire student section being kicked out of the stadium after students threw debris on the field.

"This staff hasn't had a lot of Colorado ties," Walters said. "They emphasize it, but I think they do a good job of preparing for rivalry games similar to every game.

"Your anxiety level isn't too high and your performance level is probably at the peak of where it can be. It's two different styles. I'm sure both would argue that they work."

One of the many mantras and bits of philosophy Hawkins has consistently preached since taking over the CU program in 2006 has been teaching his players not to get too high or too low regardless of the opponent or any particular outcome.

To some, that approach takes some of the fun and plenty of the emotion out of the game, but Hawkins isn't about to change it.

Hawkins hasn't completely avoided fueling the fire in the rivalry either.

During his difficult first season in 2006 when the Buffs went 2-10, Hawkins told a crowd during homecoming rally, "The worst days as a Buff are better than the best days as a Cornhusker."

It's not clear how big a part, if any, Hawkins played last year in providing T-shirts to the Buffs that read "The Real Blackshirts" a reference to the nickname given to the best Nebraska defenses over the years.

When the Buffs arrived in the locker room on game day, each player found one of those shirts at their lockers, fifth-year wide receiver Patrick Williams said. The shirts were simply a rebuttal of sorts to T-shirts worn by the Cornhuskers in 2005 carrying the phrase "Restore the Order."

The Buffs have no plans for any T-shirts or other gimmicks this season. Most of the veteran players interviewed for this story said they prefer the new no-nonsense approach to the game versus all the fuss

of the past.

“Now we treat it like every other game and we prepare for every game like it’s the biggest team we’re ever going to play,” senior center Daniel Sanders said. “We don’t put as much emphasis on it as we used to, but we put as much as we do for every game now.”

Despite the switch to a more low-key approach to the rivalry, veteran players said they believe the disdain for the Cornhuskers remains strong because players teach each other to keep that tradition alive.

“We don’t need our coaches to instill that in the younger players,” Williams said. “We’re doing that, cause it’s our tradition really.”



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# Hawk's graduate assistants carry full-time load

## Avalos, Bever add recruiting to their duties

By Kyle Ringo

Sunday, November 23, 2008

In some college football programs, life as a graduate assistant coach is all grunt work. Men toil through thankless hours of breaking down film, paperwork and recruiting legwork with little reward outside of a pat on the back once or twice a year.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins treats the positions differently.

Hawkins designates multiple coaching responsibilities to his two graduate assistants Joe Bever and Andy Avalos. They are encouraged to work just as hard in recruiting, without ever leaving campus to do it, as full-time assistants who spend dozens of days and nights in airports and hotels each year.

Bever and Avalos will complete their third and final year in the program, whenever this season ends for the Buffs. That could be Friday in Lincoln, Neb., in the regular-season finale, and it could be in a bowl game if the Buffs win.

Next spring, two new graduate assistants will take over their jobs.

"There is just a lot of midnight oil being spent," Hawkins said describing life as a G.A. "I mean, those guys are just endlessly breaking down film. While the coaches may get a little blow here and there, they've got the laptop out, and, I mean, they're kind of the heart and soul of your outfit. It's really important to have good guys there.

"We're going to miss those guys."

Both joined the program in 2006 when Hawkins was hired away from Boise State. Each had worked for Hawkins there in one way or another. Avalos played linebacker for the Broncos and graduated there in 2004. Bever was a volunteer for one year in Boise.

Hawkins said he knew Avalos would eventually become a good coach even when he was still a player at Boise State. Avalos coaches the outside linebacker position in the Buffs' defense.

Though Bever is the offensive graduate assistant, he also spends much of his time directing defenders.

His primary responsibility has been to give the first-team offense a great look at what it will face each week by organizing the scout team defense to look as much like the opponent as possible.

Bever and Avalos do all their work for the football program while handling an academic load just like many of the players they coach. Their tuition in graduate school is paid for through the football program

but the work they do in the program more than earns it.

"There is no glory in it," Avalos said. "You're at the bottom of the totem pole."

Days off come few and far between for graduate assistants.

Avalos spent the past week working hard on the game plan for beating Nebraska and helping his players learn their responsibilities while keeping up his recruiting efforts.

When the players had a day off Friday, he spent the day defending his Masters thesis, the final hurdle to earning his Masters degree in education.

CU's two graduate assistants are a bridge between coaches and players, though these days they lean more to the coaching side.

"It gets tough at times because you want to be out there coaching and have a little more say and stuff, but there is no question it's worth it, especially being on this staff because this staff really treats you like a fulltime coach," said Bever, a former walk-on quarterback at Clemson. "I got buddies who are doing the GA thing and all they do is the do-boy stuff."

Bever studied engineering management the past three years in Boulder. Not every successful college coach spends time as a graduate assistant, but it seems to be a road well traveled.

Running backs coach Darian Hagan and wide receivers coach and passing game coordinator Eric Kiesau are the only members of Hawkins' coaching staff who did not begin their coaching careers as graduate assistants. Though even Kiesau began in similar fashion, serving as "teamwork coordinator" at Oregon under coach Mike Belotti.

Bever and Avalos said it takes determination to get through some of the most challenging times, but their passion for the game makes it easy in the end.

"I just love coaching football," Avalos said. "I love being around the guys. I love the camaraderie. I love the game. Do I want to stay in college football? Yeah, I do, but it wouldn't be a bad deal to go back to Southern California where I'm from and coach high school football."

Bever intends to stay at the college level, though he understands he might have to begin his career at a lower level and work his way up. The thought of leaving big-time college football for a small program somewhere isn't ideal, but he has worked for a man the past three years who has proven a coach can start anywhere and be successful.

Hawkins coached at the high school and small college levels before earning a job as a position coach at Boise State, a non-Bowl Championship Series school. He went on to earn the head coaching job there before taking over at CU and what he calls "big boy football."

Avalos and Bever said they are happy they were able to work at CU during the past three years because the period encompassed many challenges and changes for one program. It taught each a lot about how to handle some of what happens on the periphery of actually coaching.

"The No. 1 thing without a doubt is eventually great people produce great results," Bever said when asked what he will take away from his time in Boulder. "That's the biggest thing that coach Hawk and

this program have going and all the people around here. We really stress team chemistry to our guys and it's hard to have team chemistry if your coaching staff and all that don't have it. Without that, your team is going to feel it."



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## Freshman safety Mahnke makes his mark

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — The solid play of Colorado safety Patrick Mahnke against Oklahoma State did not surprise his teammates or coaches. But everyone wonders when the freshman's first blocked kick will occur.

As a three-year starter at Mountain Vista High School in Highlands Ranch, Mahnke got a hand on seven kicks, including four (three punts, one field goal) last fall as a senior.

"That ability certainly caught our eye," CU coach Dan Hawkins said. "That says something about effort."

Mahnke, 6-feet-1 and 195 pounds, is one of eight true freshmen who suit up for the Buffaloes this season. He was among the least heralded, rating as just the nation's 99th-rated safety prospect by PrepStar. But Colorado coaches, who are not hung up on recruiting rankings, invited Mahnke to attend the CU summer camp. They liked what they saw.

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"We got a good look at Pat and knew what we were going to get," Colorado defensive backs coach Greg Brown said. "The guy is an athlete. He's a good basketball player. You can see the change in movement. He's big for a safety. He can run and hit and tackle. He's got a great future."

Mahnke liked what he saw, too. In early June 2007, he became the first member of the 2008 recruiting class that signed on last February.

"I really liked the coaches and the program," Mahnke said. "I pictured myself playing here."

That's not to say he grew up wanting to be a Colorado Buffalo. As a kid, Mahnke was thinking red. Don't have a heart attack, CU fans. He was born in Milwaukee and became a University of Wisconsin fan.

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The family moved to Phoenix when he was in grade school, and then to the Denver metro area during his middle-school years.

Mahnke's tenacious play during August drills convinced Hawkins the youngster could contribute immediately on special teams, while providing depth to the secondary. Mahnke had drawn only spot duty at safety until the Oklahoma State game.

On the Cowboys' first offensive play, CU senior safety Ryan Walters suffered a high ankle sprain while tackling OSU tailback Kendall Hunter. Mahnke played the remainder of the game in Walters' place.

"Seriously, right before that first play, I told Pat, 'Keep an eye on Ryan and make sure he doesn't get any sort of injury,' " Brown recalled. "Then, there it was."

With no time to become mentally prepared, Mahnke had to get over an early case of the jitters.

"I was not expecting to go in that soon," Mahnke said. "I didn't even see Ryan go down. I was surprised. During the first few series, I was definitely nervous. But then, once I started to play, I got comfortable. I got more comfortable as the game went on."

Forced into action against one of the Big 12's most explosive offenses, Mahnke made five tackles, including four solos. He swatted away two Zac Robinson passes. Afterward, CU sophomore cornerback Jalil Brown paid the rookie a supreme compliment. Mahnke performed like he belonged.

"I couldn't tell that Mahnke wasn't supposed to be out there," Brown said. "He was running around out there making plays."

Mahnke has not been to Nebraska's Memorial

Stadium. But having faithfully watched the telecast of every Colorado vs. Nebraska game since he moved to the Front Range, Mahnke thinks he knows what to expect.

"I'm sure it's going to be physical," Mahnke said. "There have been some memorable, crazy games. And I know that (Huskers quarterback) Joe Ganz is having a good big year for them."

With the availability of Walters and senior safety D.J. Dykes (illness) still uncertain, Mahnke said he is preparing for Friday's game like he will get a lot of playing time, even if he does not start.

Junior tight end Riar Geer, who often goes against Mahnke in practices, has no doubts the first-year safety is up to the task.

"To be a contributor as a freshman, he's played in big games already," Geer said. "I expect he will treat this game like he does all the other games and go out and play hard."

"That's what Pat does all the time, anyway."

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# Rocky Mountain News

## Desire for fresh start tugged Behrens to CU

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

Published November 23, 2008 at 6 a.m.

**BOULDER** — It would not be quite accurate to say the tune exploding from the loudspeakers in the University of Colorado's practice bubble was music to Jake Behrens' ears, but it did strike a note of familiarity.

Central to the Buffaloes' preparation for their game Friday at Nebraska is dealing with the decibels in sold-out, blood-red Memorial Stadium. One way to accomplish that is practicing in an enclosed facility with earsplitting crowd noise in the background.

And a very large part of that clatter is the Nebraska fight song, featuring the refrain, "Go Huskers!"

Behrens hears it but doesn't hum along. In another time, he might have. Now, he suppresses a smile and goes about his business — playing fullback for CU.

"Yeah, I notice and, subconsciously at least, some of that brings back a little (memory) of younger days, when I heard that song quite a bit," he said.

Behrens grew up in Omaha, accompanied his parents to at least one Nebraska game every season and attended Millard North High School,

which traditionally has pumped out future Cornhuskers like Disney pumps out movies.

Husker heroes, such as former quarterback Eric Crouch, revered by Behrens and an entire state, earned diplomas from Millard North and never wavered in their decisions about higher education and college football careers.

Behrens did waver and became CU's first Nebraska signee since 1988 because, "I'd spent the first 18 years of my life (in Nebraska) and I kind of wanted a fresh start going to college — something new, something different ...

"I started thinking, getting out of Nebraska might not be such a bad idea. I started basically thinking what would be the best for me, the long-term advantages."

In truth, the Cornhuskers didn't begin recruiting him until the latter part of his senior season, and by then the former CU staff already had spent nearly a full year courting him. Behrens liked the interest, liked Boulder even more and didn't like the direction he perceived Nebraska was taking under former coach Bill Callahan.

It all made for a relatively easy decision, even though it required leaving a state where college football has no peer and coming to a neighboring one where his sport can get lost in any number of shuffles.

"They really don't have anything else to cheer for (in Nebraska)," Behrens said. "We don't have the pro teams or any mountains to go to. In

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Nebraska, pretty much all there is is football.

"I mean, we have the College World Series in the summertime, but you're not usually (rooting) for one specific team. And aside from maybe one or two people trying to be rebellious, growing up in Nebraska, pretty much everyone there is a Nebraska fan."

Behrens, a 6-foot, 230-pounder, played against at least two current Cornhuskers — defensive end Zach Potter and long-snapper T.J. O'Leary — in high school.

Some younger Buffs teammates have asked him, "Is it all that crazy?" in Memorial Stadium, and he has told them to expect "lots of red, lots of noise and a packed house — it's always a packed house."

But he also passed on this: "The easiest way to deal with the crowd is to come out strong and silence them — then you don't have to worry too much about that."

Behrens splits time at fullback with senior co-captain Maurice Cantrell. Tight ends/fullbacks coach Kent Riddle said Behrens adjusts well on the field and that his overall play has improved.

"He's made plays when he's had the opportunity," Riddle said. "He put himself in that situation by doing everything well."

Fullbacks' statistics usually are meager. Behrens entered the season with five career carries for 33 yards and a 1-yard touchdown reception on his

first college catch. This season, he's still awaiting his first carry but has made 12 receptions for 75 yards and two touchdowns.

Riddle declined to say Behrens' role has become more of a receiver: "He just understands the whole package and is evolving in that. He's a guy you can count on."

And that's how Behrens wants to be viewed. He believes his run blocking and pass protection have improved, as have his receiving and running after a catch.

"I'm trying to do it all," he said. "I felt I could be part of something good (at CU)."

His mind won't change, no matter what his former neighbors might think.

**Click here to reading about Nebraska's Pierre Allen**

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# Rocky Mountain News

## In Huskers-Buffs rivalry, opposites attract

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

Published November 23, 2008 at 6 a.m.



Rocky photo illustration

Nebraska's Pierre Allen, left, grew up in Denver, and Colorado's Jake Behrens, right, grew up in Omaha.

They didn't know it at the time, but they grew up behind enemy lines. The areas of demarcation would be defined much later in life. Jake Behrens, a University of Colorado fullback, was reared in Omaha. Pierre Allen, a Nebraska defensive end, was reared in Denver.

Their common bond: football, and it will bring them together Friday in Lincoln, when the Buffaloes and Cornhuskers play for the 67th time.

Neither Behrens, a junior, nor Allen, a sophomore, consider themselves headliners. But both play substantial roles for their teams, and each is viewed by opposing coaches sizing them up as a solid contributor.

Both look at the game Friday in Memorial Stadium for what it means to their teams: With a win, CU can become bowl eligible for the second consecutive time under third-year coach Dan Hawkins; Nebraska, already ticketed for postseason play, can earn an eighth win under first-year coach Bo Pelini and further validate what Cornhuskers fans view as a solid start toward regaining respectability.

But on the personal side, Behrens and Allen are playing for something else, as so succinctly explained by Behrens: "It's for bragging rights back home, so I don't have to take any crap from anybody."

**Click here to continue reading about Jake Behrens**

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