



CU's Pitman pleased with Buffs' offseason conditioning regimen

Buff's enjoy best offseason program since staff's arrival

By Kyle Ringo
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Plenty of folks are looking for signs of hope from the Colorado football program, and there might not be any more convincing than what strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman had to say this week about the Buffs' performance in his winter conditioning program.

The one member of the coaching staff who is allowed unfettered access to players in January, February and March, Pitman said this year has been the best since he joined the program late in the spring of 2006.

"Overall team-wise, they've always physically made the commitment, but mentally, I think they kind of got over the top," Pitman said. "They accepted all the challenges I put to them and surpassed all my goals I had for the team and individuals."

Pitman said there was a better attitude throughout this winter and he believes there are two reasons for it. The team is finally beginning to mature with the average age of players increasing, and everyone in the program is just "tired of losing."

Players completed the winter portion of the program a week ago and are on spring break for the next week before reporting back to school and the start of spring practices next week. It's been a relatively quiet and productive offseason, as compared to previous years under coach Dan Hawkins.

Coaches began a new approach to the offseason this year by separating players into "accountability groups" where if one player broke the rules or was late for class or a workout, the whole group got punished. The gruff, no-nonsense strength coach almost smiled when talking about the groups --- almost.

"In the past, I've always been the hammer on everything," Pitman said. "So I love the accountability groups, because now I'll still nail 'em if they mess up in here, but if they miss a class or some-thing, the groups take care of it themselves. So I don't have to be the bad guy with everything. I love the accountability groups."

While the entire team performed better than in the past, a few players stuck out to Pitman. He mentioned running back Darrell Scott and tackle Nate Solder by name and raved about the offensive line as a group.

Scott endured a difficult freshman campaign last fall in which he was injured much of the time and

unable to practice or play at top speed. Some believe the problems began when Scott showed up in Boulder out of shape just a few weeks before the start of fall camp.

Pitman said Scott showed up big time in the weight room this winter. Scott is down to 205 pounds and is over the ankle injury that plagued him throughout the fall.

"We're extremely happy with Darrell's progress," Pitman said. "I think he's done a great job. That guy has got a lot of pressure on him and he responded. Like all the guys, I don't make things easy on him, and he did a great job responding."

Those who know Pitman might not believe it's possible for him to sound giddy about anything. He came awful close when talking about Solder, whom he says is 6-foot-9, 305 pounds and runs a 4.8-second 40-yard dash, has a 34-inch vertical jump with 10 percent body fat.

"He's a freak," Pitman said. "That guy, for his size and how tall he is, in 16 years he very well may be one of the best athletes I've ever worked with. He took it to a whole different level. I mean he's head and shoulders above a lot of dudes over the years. You know, I've worked with a lot of guys in the NFL."

Pitman said he added a wrinkle to the program this year measuring players against one another on a pound-for-pound basis. Pitman said pound-for-pound the strongest player on the team is running back Rodney Stewart, who is 5-6, 175 pounds.

Cornerback Jimmy Smith is the fastest player on the team with an average 40-yard speed of 4.4 seconds. Smith was one of nine players on the team consistently timed in the 4.4 and 4.5-second range in the 40.

There was also a little more fun in the program this year. Pitman returned to an offseason strategy he had used previously at Boise State but never in his previous years at CU. He worked with the offensive and defensive linemen separately from the rest of the team in a "World's Strongest Man" format.

The linemen would get together in the practice bubble on certain days of the week and push sleds 50 yards down field. They also flipped a 250-pound tire down the field and then hit the tire with sledgehammers. The linemen also competed against each other in Sumo wrestling.

"I think they enjoyed it," Pitman said. "I mean, it's not easy, but we just did some different drills just to test 'em and I think they did good with it."

Pitman watched in disbelief last fall as player after player succumbed to injury. A total of 19 players sustained some sort of injury that required surgery during or after the season. Throw in cornerback Ben Burney, who needed five surgeries after the 2007 season and a total of 20 players were beat up pretty badly in 2008.

The injuries did not have a big effect on the offseason program. Seven players who were recovering from injuries or surgeries, were forced to do an alternate workout at the same time their teammates worked out.

"You know, if it was a shoulder or knee, the rest of their body got crushed," Pitman said.

Pitman said he analyzed his program from top to bottom to see if there was something more he could be doing or something on which he needed to cut back or eliminate. In the end, he made a few subtle

changes.

"We took a look at a lot of things," Pitman said. "We changed up some running, not that I thought things we did in the past were bad or caused anything. We probably had more injuries last year than I've had in 16 years prior."

"We were healthy last spring and healthy through summer and the first day of camp hits, it's like a grenade went off. Of course you've got to adapt and change and take a look at stuff."



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