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Buff's sticking to belief

Colorado gets shot at No. 3 OU today

By Patrick Ridgell

The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — With the highest-ranked opponent to visit town in four years dropping by Folsom Field today, the Colorado Buffaloes better believe they can hang with No. 3 Oklahoma.

The question posed this week to CU coach Dan Hawkins was whether his young, improving bunch can beat a loaded Oklahoma program, one that harbors realistic national-title aspirations.

CU's recent history suggests the Buffs can't. They'll carry a 14-game losing streak against ranked teams into the game, and during CU's 2-10 nightmare in 2006, the only group that physically manhandled the Buffs was Oklahoma's defense.

Then again, recent history suggests the Buffs do have a shot.

"Totally, anybody is beatable and anyone can beat you," Hawkins said. "I've just been doing this for too long, I mean, Montana State can beat you and you can beat (Southern Cal). You have to play efficient, and you have to do things right. You can't leave stones unturned; you have a field-goal attempt, you have to make it. You can't turn the ball over, and we're having those issues. You have to play clean, but can Appy (Appalachian) State beat Michigan? Yeah. You can win and you can lose on any given Saturday."

That's fine, but Oklahoma is among the nation's top 10 in scoring, scoring defense, rushing offense, rushing defense, total offense and total defense. The Sooners are one of those rare teams that have achieved almost perfect balance on offense, rushing for 252.2 yards per game, 5.8 a carry, and throwing for 310 yards a game.

Oklahoma's Allen Patrick has 305 rushing yards, third most in the Big 12. Receivers Juaquin Iglesias and Malcolm Kelly are fourth and sixth in the league in receiving yards per game, with 111 and 87.2. Redshirt freshman quarterback Sam Bradford is playing beyond his years, with a passing efficiency rating that places him second in the nation.

Oklahoma's defense is fast and physical. Junior cornerback Reggie Smith might be the best pass defender CU will play in 2007. While the Buffs saw some great athletes two weeks ago against Florida State, they say there's something different about the ones they'll face today.

"Florida State has great athletes and great coaches, but they don't mix it up as often as Oklahoma does," CU quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "Oklahoma, you get in a third-down situation, and you're spinning the wheel of fortune to see what defense they want to play, because they have thousands of different things they can do to you."

Coaches and players said the Buffs must force turnovers today. They're minus-6 in turnover margin in 2007. Oklahoma is plus-3.

CU linebacker Jordon Dizon said the Buffs have to worry more about themselves than any opponent.



Redshirt freshman quarterback Cody Hawkins and the Buffs take aim at the nation's No. 3-ranked team today when Oklahoma visits Folsom Field. The game is CU's Big 12 opener. **Times-Call/Lewis Geyer**

“You can’t focus on the other team,” Dizon said. “Once you do that, you lose.

“We have to focus on ourselves. The team that’s going to beat us is our own selves. We need to focus on our mistakes and what we’re doing wrong and what we have to do right. Once we play our defense, we’re going to play a hell of a game.”

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Bufs set for third-ranked OU

Sooners boast nation's top-scoring offense, No. 4 defense against run

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, September 29, 2007

About halfway through Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins' press conference earlier this week, a reporter stopped writing down the coach's words raving about this week's opponent to pose a simple question.

To that point, Hawkins' honest assessment had made the No. 3 ranked Oklahoma Sooners sound unbeatable, superhuman even. Definitely not your typical homecoming opponent.

"They are really good," Hawkins said. "There are no real weaknesses. They can throw it. They can run it. They are big up front. They've got speed. They have receivers, running backs. Same thing on defense. They are big and fast. They have a very good kicking game, all the way around, kickers, punters, returners are very solid all the way around.

"They are one of those teams that when you watch them — typically you don't do this much at this level anyway — but you don't look at anybody and say, 'Oh I bet we can get this on that guy.' There is none of that here. They are a very complete football team."

So the reporter asked the most logical question under the circumstances.

"Can you beat them?"

No football coach in his right mind is going to answer in any other way in any week regardless of the opponent than Hawkins did. But considering the Bufs are 2-2 this season with a lot of question marks and 4-12 under Hawkins, the question cried out for an answer.

"Totally, anybody is beatable and anyone can beat you," he said.

It doesn't matter that few in the room believed in what Hawkins was saying when it comes to this particular game. What matters is whether his players believe it. And today we find out when the Bufs host the highest scoring team in the country at Folsom Field (11:30 a.m., Fox Sports Net).

Oklahoma comes to town 4-0 and the prohibitive favorite to repeat as Big 12 Conference champions and maybe evenplay for a national title. In his last two meetings with Colorado, coach Bob Stoops has beaten the Bufs by the combined score of 66-6.

The Sooners have scored at least 51 points in every game so far this season, despite using a redshirt freshman at quarterback.

Sam Bradford ranks as the second-most efficient passer in the country through the first month of the season, completing 78 percent of his passes with 14 touchdown passes and two interceptions.

He is surrounded by talent that will tax a CU defense which has performed well to this point in the season. The Buffs are faced with stopping a running game led by tailback Allen Patrick that averages more than 250 yards per outing. They are also expected to stop a passing game that gobbles up more than 300 yards a game with a pair of talented wide receivers, Malcolm Kelly and Juaquin Iglesias, doing most of the damage.

Everyone on the CU side of the ball needs to play today on par with the sort of season linebacker Jordon Dizon is putting together. Dizon is leading the nation in tackles and seems to be in on every play all over the field.

Even if the CU defense does find a way to slow down the Sooners, the Buffs on offense will have to play much better than they have in any game so far in the Dan Hawkins era.

CU is coming off a 42-0 victory over Miami (Ohio), but this is a much better opponent. Prior to racking up more than 350 rushing yards a week ago, the Buffs running game lacked any punch in losses to Arizona State and Florida State. It produced a total of 5 yards on 51 carries in those games. The Sooners rank No. 4 in the nation against the run.

The Buffs have added true freshmen offensive linemen Kai Maiava to the starting lineup and fellow true freshman Ryan Miller will see plenty of playing time as well. Whether they make a difference will be one key to the contest.

If the Buffs are unable to run the ball once again, quarterback Cody Hawkins might be forced to throw the ball more than 50 times, as he did against FSU.

Hawkins has been a mixed bag so far. He has led the Buffs on long drives against every opponent this season, but he also has made the sort of mistakes and miscalculations expected from a youngster. He has thrown six interceptions, a number that would be higher if not for several drops by defenders.

This is the highest ranked team Dan Hawkins has ever coached against. He nearly pulled off an upset a year ago when the Buffs played at then-No. 9 Georgia.

"You need to do the things that are within your control and certainly, there have been enough opportunities for us around here in the past couple of years to be able to do that," he said. "That is really what we focus on."



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Colorado vs. No. 3 Oklahoma matchups

CU RUN OFFENSE VS. OU RUN DEFENSE — Sure the Buffs ran for 359 yards last week against Miami (Ohio), but in two games before that against Florida State and Arizona State, they ran for five yards on 51 carries. This Oklahoma defense is easily the best the Buffs have faced. It ranks fourth nationally against the run, allowing 1.3 yards per carry. Look for another dismal day on the ground for CU. Maybe the Buffs can find a way to break a long one and help their average. Otherwise count on a lot of short gains and negative-yardage plays once again. **Edge: OU.**

CU PASS OFFENSE VS. OU PASS DEFENSE — The Buffs will need an exceptional game in this area to win, but with so much inexperience, we're not sure they're up to it quite yet. Quarterback Cody Hawkins has played well for the most part, but he has shown a tendency to make a couple bad throws each game. That will cost him dearly today. Hawkins has thrown to 16 different receivers, which means the Sooners will have a lot of people to pay attention to, but they're up to the task. The Sooners have up 354 passing yards last week to a quirky Tulsa offense, but they also sacked the quarterback six times and made two interceptions. **Edge: OU.**

OU RUN OFFENSE VS. CU RUN DEFENSE — If you're going to have any success against this offense, the first order of business is taking away the running game and making the redshirt freshman quarterback beat you. The Buffs made the Sooners fight for every yard a year ago, and we're guessing they will be tough to run against this year. But just like last year, the Sooners should be able to produce enough to win. One thing to keep in mind about last year's game was the Buffs had a full compliment of linebackers and OU was missing its starting tailback. The Sooners' starter this year, Allen Patrick, is averaging nine yards per carry. The Buffs will bring that average down some. Patrick is one of four backs getting consistent carries. DeMarco Murray has already scored eight touchdowns. **Edge: OU.**

OU PASS OFFENSE VS. CU PASS DEFENSE — This is another area in which the Buffs have done well of late, but the No. 3 team in the land represents quite a step up in competition. CU held its past two opponents to 221 combined passing yards. The Buffs have been exceptional of late on third downs, allowing conversions on nine of the past 45 attempts. Cornerback Terrence Wheatley is an All-Big 12 performer and should be able to make some plays. The featured matchup then is on the other side where Ben Burney needs to have a big game. The Buffs have been able to pressure the quarterback reasonably well so far. But the Sooners have a massive offensive line that will be the biggest test CU has seen. OU quarterback Sam Bradford has thrown 14 touchdown passes and has a 78 percent completion rate. **Edge: OU.**

SPECIAL TEAMS — CU has been inconsistent on special teams. Place-kicker Kevin Eberhart has made just three of six attempts and hasn't proven he is capable of making a kick of more than 40 yards (0-2). Punter Matt DiLallo's net average is 33.8. CU has given up several long kickoff returns, but its return game has been the bright spot so far with Terrence Wheatley and Chase McBride both performing well. OU place-kicker Garrett Hartley was one of three finalists for the Lou Groza Award last season. He has made three of four field goal attempts this year but only 31 of 34 point-after tries. Punter Michael Cohen is averaging 42.8 yards and Reggie Smith is one of the most dangerous return men in the Big 12. **Edge: OU.**

PREDICTION — Oklahoma 30-9

— **Kyle Ringo**



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Woelk: Buffs find out today how they stack up

By Neill Woelk

Saturday, September 29, 2007

If indeed you have designs on playing for conference titles and being a contender in the national picture, there's no better barometer than playing the best.

Say hello to the big dogs, Colorado. The Oklahoma Sooners are in town.

If the Buffs want to know how they measure up in the big picture, they'll have a very good idea by day's end.

Almost nobody — at least nobody willing to bet their next pay check — believes the Buffs have even a puncher's chance today. The oddsmakers are giving at least three touchdowns to anyone who has the urge to place a wager on the black and gold. The general consensus is the Buffs will be more black and blue when this one is finished.

The Sooners are considered to be among the big three this year in college football, joining Southern Cal and LSU. A half-step behind is Florida, with another half-dozen or so doing their best to jump from pretender to bona fide contender.

This isn't Arizona State or Florida State.

The Sooners are the real deal.

No. 3 OU is the highest-ranked team the Buffs have played since 2005, when they got two shots at No. 2 Texas. In case you've forgotten, that didn't turn out so well. The Longhorns won the first matchup, 42-17, then drilled the Buffs 70-3 in the Big 12 title game, putting the final touches on Gary Barnett's exit.

Fact is, the Buffs haven't fared well against top-10 teams in years. They've lost nine in a row against top-10 foes, with their last victories coming in 2001, when they knocked off No. 2 Nebraska and No. 3 Texas in back-to-back weekends.

There are all kinds of theories — that's code for wishful thinking — on how the Buffs can spring an upset of epic proportions today.

They all involve mistakes by the Sooners and a perfect game by the Buffs. CU faithful envision some early turnovers by the Sooners (OU has turned it over only five times this year), or a big special teams play (the Buffs haven't produced any big returns since the season opener vs. Colorado State).

Thing is, Arizona State attempted to hand CU half that recipe, and the Buffs politely handed it back. ASU gave the Buffs a 14-point lead and a chance for more, but the Buffs couldn't capitalize. If the Buffs are to have a legitimate shot today, they can't depend upon fluke occurrences.

More than anything else, the Buffs have to prove their offense can move the ball against a good — in this case, very good — defense.

It's already been the difference in two games this year. If the Buffs could have mustered any kind of consistent offense against either ASU or Florida State, they would have had a better-than-even chance of winning those games.

If they can't move the ball today early in the game, it will be a long, long day.

Thus far, we've seen good things from CU's defense. While today will be by far the biggest test yet for Buff defenders, CU fans still like to think the CU defense can at least keep the game close early.

But if the offense can't produce anything more than four- or five-play drives, the defense will wear down. It happened at ASU, and it will happen today.

Colorado fans are also hoping (again, wishing) that the Sooners will be looking ahead to next week's Red River Shootout with Texas.

Not gonna' happen. OU coach Bob Stoops has made sure his team will not look past anyone.

It still comes back to CU's offense. The Buffs have to be able to move the ball, keep the defense off the field and shorten the game.

Not that a CU win is impossible. Remember, this is already a season when Appalachian State knocked off Michigan.

But if the Buffs are going to have a chance, they will have to play a perfect game.

That's not something we've seen thus far.

Today would be a heck of a time to start.



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