



Bufs aim to turn Tide

Hawkins tries to put team in right 'frame of mind'

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, December 29, 2007

SHREVEPORT, La. -- If a team's demeanor follows that of its coach and if frame of mind in advance of a football game matters to the outcome, the Colorado Buffaloes might earn a big win tonight when they play Alabama on national television in the 32nd Independence Bowl.

All week there has been a noticeable difference in the attitude and personality of the teams involved.

While Alabama coach Nick Saban has been sullen and lacking in the "Roll Tide" spirit, CU coach Dan Hawkins has been upbeat and understanding -- no matter what inane question was tossed his way.

Players have followed their coaches' lead.

The difference was striking Saturday morning when both coaches flanked, by a pair of seniors, met the media for the final time in advance of the game at Independence Stadium.

Saban twice chided media members for asking him hypothetical questions and later suggested defensive lineman Wallace Gilberry not answer another hypothetical.

Shortly after his press conference began, a reporter asked Hawkins if he could ask a hypothetical question. "Sure," Hawkins said.

"I'm so much into what your state of mind is," Hawkins said. "It's not really whether you're the favorite or the underdog. I think a person always has to go out and sing their song and do their dance and play their music and do it to the best of their ability.

"I think that's what we always try to get our guys to focus on."

Colorado is trying to avoid back-to-back losing seasons for the first time in 23 years. The last time the Bufs suffered consecutive losing campaigns came in 1983-84.

Alabama is a mild favorite in the matchup of 6-6 teams, and, to be fair, Alabama players and coaches have said repeatedly their bowl practices have been among their best and most passionate of the season.

"I like what the players have invested in terms of their effort for this game," Saban said.

Both programs hope to complete 2007 on a winning note and finish with winning records. Both know today's game can set the tone for spring football and next season. Saban went as far as to say this Tier 3 bowl is "a defining moment for everyone on our team."

Hawkins has emphasized finishing strong all season and nothing in his message has changed this week. No matter the outcome, this already has been a special season for the Colorado coach, who endured a 2-10 campaign in 2006.

Saturday morning Hawkins said his 1993 team at Willamette University was his favorite team he had coached, but that was before this season. Hawkins said the 2007 Buffs have moved to the top of the list.

"These guys have been great," he said. "To me, it's been my favorite year in coaching."

Adding a victory tonight over a team from the powerful Southeastern Conference would only enhance that feeling in Hawkins, who is 2-2 in previous bowl games -- all as coach at Boise State. Saban is 3-5 in bowl games coaching at Michigan State and Louisiana State. One of those victories earned him a national championship.

This is the 55th bowl appearance for Alabama, which is searching for its 30th bowl victory. CU is making its 28th bowl appearance and has a 12-15 record. The Buffs have lost three of their last four bowl games, all under former coach Gary Barnett.

Colorado coaches have emphasized stopping the Alabama running game in the two weeks of preparation devoted to the game plan. But coaches also have followed a formula Hawkins deeply believes in when it comes to winning bowl games.

Hawkins said he has polled other head coaches who have been successful in the postseason and the common denominators have been keeping players in shape throughout the long layoff and devoting plenty of practice time to keeping special teams units sharp. The Buffs have followed that script.

The game is the finale for a pair of senior classes who have inspired decidedly different opinions from their fans.

The Colorado seniors are generally viewed as a group that has endured turmoil and exodus, a coaching change and ugly allegations only to persevere and finish strong. Alabama's senior class is seen by a percentage of its fan base as a group that has participated in one of the weaker periods in the program's recent history.

Today Buff fans bid adieu to players such as Terrence Wheatley, Hugh Charles, Byron Ellis, Cody Crawford, Tyler Polumbus, Edwin Harrison, Dusty Sprague, Stephone Robinson and Jordon Dizon.

Dizon, who led the Big 12 Conference in total tackles, has caught the attention of the Alabama offense because he is all over the field.

"I think he's made every tackle our team has ever made," Polumbus joked Saturday. "He's a freak."

Dizon will set a school record today playing in his 51st game. He has never missed a practice or a game during an illustrious career that he hopes to cap with a victory against a quality opponent.

"It's the same as every other game," Dizon said. "If you try to change your ways, if you try to do something different, you're going to miss a step. You're going to freak out. I'm just taking it like any other game."



Woelk: Buffs have chance to put exclamation mark on year

If they were keeping score based on pre-game impressions and good will created by teams, the Colorado Buffaloes would have a sizable lead over Alabama heading into tonight's Independence Bowl.

Certainly, the Buffs have done an outstanding job of representing themselves in Shreveport. From their excursion to loading food for charities to a tour of a local Air Force base to the donation of hundreds of tickets to a wide variety of groups, the Buffs have made friends just about everywhere they've gone.

Bowl chairman Joe Darwin even took the time this week to send an unsolicited e-mail to the media, saying the Buffs' participation in the charity food event was "overwhelming." Darwin also noted, "From everyone in the Shreveport / Bossier City community, thank you for sending your finest to our area."

For a program that found itself splashed across the sports pages for all the wrong reasons just a few years ago, that's a tremendous turnaround. Give Dan Hawkins and his players full credit for conducting themselves in a manner that represented not only the university, but an entire state, in a positive light.

But they don't give points for good vibes these days. When the Buffs and Crimson Tide kick off tonight, the scoreboard will still read 0-0. Then it will be up to Hawkins and his players to continue to represent the program as one going in the right direction.

That's no easy assignment.

The Crimson Tide, embarrassed by a season-ending four-game losing streak that included a loss to Louisiana-Monroe, walked into Shreveport with a chip on its shoulder. While the Buffs have given the impression of being excited about being part of the game, the Tide and coach Nick Saban evidently settled on surliness as their M.O.

Saban even went as far as to tell a couple of his players not to answer certain questions at Saturday's press conference. By most accounts, Saban has given the impression this week that he deserves better than Shreveport and the Independence Bowl, and is tolerating the experience rather than embracing it.

But along with a 'Bama-sized chip, the Tide is also loaded with talent. Enough, anyway, that Alabama was 6-2 at one point this season and ranked No. 17 in the nation after soundly whipping Tennessee.

In terms of pure athletic ability, Alabama is on par with some of the best teams CU faced this year.

That's a big hurdle for the Buffs to overcome. Simply, the Buffs will have to be at their best to be competitive. That means producing some big plays on offense, limiting big plays on defense and keeping turnovers to a minimum.

Even more than in the regular season, bowl games seem to turn on big plays. Momentum shifts are more dramatic, and emotion plays a huge role. It's the last game of the season -- and when teams feel a game

slipping away, there's far less motivation to come back than in a regular-season game.

Emotion might be the one place the Buffs have a distinct advantage.

No matter what happens tonight, the season will be a disappointment for the Crimson Tide. On the other hand, CU's 6-6 year is seen as a solid improvement. The Buffs have plenty of motivation to put an exclamation point on what has already been a positive step forward.

But we'll stop short of calling today's game a defining moment for the Buffs. Improvement has been registered this year, but there's still a long way to go. What the Buffs can do today is add to an already successful season.

Whether that's motivation enough remains to be seen.



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cu football

Cody Hawkins faces national-level exam

The Buffs' QB is prepared for Alabama's tough defense and SEC credentials

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Cody Hawkins (Post file)

SHREVEPORT, La. — Except for the best of the best perhaps, quarterbacks must prove themselves every time they step into the spotlight. Their beleaguered brothers include relief pitchers, stock traders and political candidates. Success and scrutiny can shift with the wind.

Colorado's Cody Hawkins understands it all. Comes with the territory, he says. Getting off

the bus, the 5-foot-11, 190-pounder doesn't look much like a quarterback. He sometimes makes freshman mistakes.

And he happens to share a surname with the head coach.

"That's Cody's biggest problem," CU offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said following a practice last week in preparation for tonight's Independence Bowl game against Alabama. "His last name is

Colorado Football

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Hawkins, and there are expectations for a kid like that."

Throwing for 2,693 yards and 19 touchdowns, Cody set several CU freshman passing records. He became the first Buffs quarterback to toss at least one touchdown pass in each of his first nine

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games and led the team to a bowl a year after watching from the bench as a redshirt while the Buffaloes struggled to a 2-10 record in 2006.

Yet, critics wonder if Cody can take the team to a championship level. Couldn't he put more zip on his passes? Can't he run faster?

And there always will be whispers about whether he would be the starting quarterback if his name were Smith.

"I don't worry about any of that stuff," Cody said. "I just focus on trying to play the best I can and helping the team win."

Fair or not, tonight's game will go a long way in formulating the national perception of the coach's kid. This is the only bowl game of the day. The opponent hails from the big, bad Southeastern Conference, where angry pass rushers turn quarterbacks into appetizers. ESPN cameras are ready. Will Cody Hawkins be?

"Clearly, you want your guys to step up and ramp up and be at their best in the big game," Dan Hawkins said, sidestepping a bit when asked about the importance of the Independence Bowl to his quarterback son.

Dan had never coached Cody until the family arrived in Boulder. They appear to have adjusted well to the new dynamic. Dan prides himself in not being a "micromanaging head coach." He delegates the hands-on coaching of the quarterbacks to Helfrich.

"If you watched our practices, you wouldn't guess that one of the players is my son," Hawkins said. "I treat every player like he's my son."

To his credit, Hawkins doesn't hesitate when asked to give a critical evaluation of Cody. Dad is proud of the way Cody has handled the pressure of being the starting quarterback and the leadership role and media attention that entails. "And he has done a great job of handling the 'coach's son thing,'" Hawkins said.

As for Cody's efforts between the lines, the report card includes some blemishes or "mulligans," as Dan puts it. Cody's 15 interceptions also set a CU freshman record.

"By all accounts, Cody has played fantastic as a freshman," said Tyler Polumbus, a senior offensive tackle. "But he has forced some stuff, thrown passes he shouldn't have. He's definitely learned from that."

That's been an adjustment. Although Cody grew up watching his father's offense at Boise State and knows the system inside and out, there's a defense to contend with. Cody has learned to reduce his mistakes.

"College defenses are good at disguising things," he explained. "You learn to take what they give you. You can't get into a guessing game."

In the past four games, he has thrown six touchdowns with just one interception.

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"Early on, Cody would get out of his rhythm and kind of stumble along," senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley observed. "Now, it almost looks easy for him."

Cody will never run 4.6 or fling the ball 75 yards in the air. But Helfrich believes quarterbacks can win in different ways. Cody has the poise, intelligence, leadership and throwing accuracy to succeed, Helfrich said.

The kid is tough enough. He was temporarily knocked out by a blitzing defender during the victory at Texas Tech, but played the remainder of the game with tissues stuck up his nose.

He had better be prepared for whatever might come his way tonight. Alabama's starting defensive ends average 277 pounds. The nation will be watching.

"I'm never scared of anything, and I'm not a nervous-type guy," Cody said. "The quarterback is always in the spotlight."

It just will be a bit brighter tonight.

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woody paige

Game of biblical impact?

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 12/30/2007 01:00:07 AM MST

SHREVEPORT, La. — The question Saturday morning to Colorado coach Dan Hawkins from an Alabama sportswriter, who apparently had been sniffing glue, was: "Do you consider this game David vs. Goliath?"

My immediate reaction was: Isn't it more like David vs. Samson after he had a haircut?

Hawkins' riposte was more ingenious: "Both of us are sitting there at the Mendoza Line and have a chance to move it to the other side."

Mario Mendoza was a major-league shortstop with a career .215 batting average.

When, exactly, did Alabama become Goliath this season? The Crimson (red in face) Tide (ebb and flow) lost Nov. 17 to the University of Louisiana-Monroe. Some guy who apparently was drinking cough syrup has the 2007 Alabama team confused with the 1979 Alabama team.

And Colorado did beat Oklahoma this season.

Colorado and Alabama have identical records, six up, six down. One will finish with a .538 average, the other .462.

Goliath was undefeated going into his matchup against David, an undersized underdog who was .500 that year.

"I don't like comparisons," Alabama coach Nick Saban said Saturday in answer to a question that had nothing to do with David or Goliath or LSU or Nebraska.

St. Nick also said he doesn't like hypothetical questions.

So I didn't ask him: "If Alabama loses tomorrow night, will the sun come up the next morning?"

Saban would have answered, as he did twice on the eve of the game with the Buffs: "That's another hypothetical question. I don't anticipate anything."

To Hawkins, who followed Saban at the podium, I said: "Can I ask you a hypothetical question?"

"Yes, of course."

Later, in the hotel lobby, Hawkins said: "I have a thousand stories." He told me one about meeting Al Davis.

Saban doesn't tell stories or jokes — and didn't splinter a smile Saturday, even when he said: "We are excited."

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Who sounds like more fun — Hawkins or Saban?

In the elevator Friday night, I said to Hawkins: "I've given advice to Eddie Crowder, Bill McCartney, Rick Neuheisel (who has served his penance and got the UCLA job Saturday) and Chuck Fairbanks (who, like Saban, once had a charisma bypass operation), and I'll give you some. Tell the players that their goal next season is not to return to Shreveport."

That is not a knock on a Louisiana river town that took in thousands of Katrina sufferers and leads all bowls in Southern-fried hospitality. It's just this: In order to move past the Mendoza Line, the Buffaloes would rather be playing in a bowl next year somewhere in Florida or Arizona.

The Alabamans were here last year and have been here three times in the past decade. Goliath, indeed.

This bowl is, as Saban put it so eloquently Saturday, "the in depend ... the Petrol In ... the PetroSun Independence Bowl."

PetroSun, the title sponsor, maintains oil drilling rigs with depths up to 9,000 feet. Maybe the winning team will get one, which is better than a Weedeater.

Pardon the Tide players if they are not as "excited" as their coach. Senior defensive end Wallace Gilberry said Alabama "didn't intentionally lose the last four games so we could play in Shreveport. Everything happens for

a reason, and we ended up here in Shreveport. We'll make the best of it."

The Buffaloes seem to be enjoying themselves more. They weren't in any kind of bowl last year with a 2-10 record. "It's been a fun time in Shreveport; the people have been great, and the seniors can go out with a win," said Tyler Polumbus, who will be playing in his third bowl, three more than his father Tad, who lettered in Boulder in 1965-66. The younger Polumbus, from Cherry Creek High School, is more Goliath than David at 6-feet-8, 300 pounds. Alabama's David Ross is 6-4, 297.

Out the windows of the CU team hotel the players can see the neon of three gigantic casinos and Larry Flynt's Hustler strip club.

"We can't go there," Polumbus said. They can go Sunday morning to the church down the street — and they can go to one more stadium Sunday night.

Will they win?

Shreveport Times columnist Jason Pugh did the game on a PlayStation, and CU won in double overtime, 38-31. Alabama lost to Florida State 21-14, and Colorado lost to Florida State 16-6, which would give the Tide a three-point edge.

And I'm picking 1 Samuel 17.

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colorado notes

Hawkins salutes "favorite team"

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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SHREVEPORT, La. — During the final news conference before tonight's Independence Bowl, Colorado coach Dan Hawkins said this 6-6 season has been "my favorite year" in coaching.

Considering that Hawkins won 11 or more games three times at Boise State with a best of 13-1 in 2003, that's saying something.

"These guys have been very, very special to me, with all the things they've been through and obviously the pain of last year (2-10)," Hawkins said Saturday. "They continued to have vision and did the kinds of things that you'd want your sons to do.

"Their leadership has been great. I spoke about Jordon (Dizon) at our banquet and I barely made it through. I basically bawled the whole time."

Watch the flanks.

Alabama coach Nick Saban said one of the

things that has impressed him most about Colorado's offense is it creates mismatches to get opponents "outflanked," so the Buffaloes can get to the corners via the run or the pass.

Regarding CU's defense, Saban said reading the multiple formations used by the Buffaloes on third down is a concern.

Bowl gifts.

Players on each team received an Independence Bowl watch, a souvenir baseball cap, a commemorative football and a Sony Bravia home theater/DVD system.

Tackling machine.

CU offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus on linebacker Dizon, a fellow senior and the Butkus Award runner-up: "I think Jordon has made every tackle our team has ever made. I don't know how he does it. The kid is freaky."

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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, December 31,
2007

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 12/30/2007

Game time

Bufs, Tide prepared for Shreveport showdown

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

SHREVEPORT, La. — There's little left to discuss when it comes to today's Independence Bowl between Colorado and Alabama (6 p.m., ESPN). But interesting topics keep coming up.

Saturday, at an Independence Bowl-eve news conference, CU coach Dan Hawkins and Alabama's Nick Saban made a few things clear.

Saban won't discuss hypothetical situations or make comparisons, and while he refuses to anticipate what'll happen today, he expects his team to play its best game of 2007.

"This is a defining game for every guy on this team," Saban said. "Everybody has a different reason for this being a really important game. I guess the thing is nobody benefits unless they play really well."

Hawkins was more loquacious. Asked about his philosophies, and, again, about coaching his son, Hawkins broke out familiar material. But he also added 2007 has been his "favorite year in coaching." He's suggested that before, but came right out and said it Saturday.

"Because of the way they continue to respond and grow and develop and hang in there," he continued. "There's no question about that."

Perhaps the strangest topic concerned CU's status in this game. Alabama is a 31/2 point favorite. Hawkins said he didn't know if he felt like an underdog today, but all week, CU players and coaches have answered questions about the dominance of football in the Southeastern Conference, in which Alabama plays. Those queries turned absurd Saturday when Hawkins was asked if CU (6-6) feels like David today against Goliath.

"No," he said. "You shouldn't look at it that way if you're David. You shouldn't look at it that way if you're Goliath. I think that's a misnomer in every case.

"So much of life is your perceptions and your mindsets. We don't preach that way and I don't believe in that."

Alabama is making its NCAA-record 55th bowl appearance today, and features tradition so grand it drew 92,138 people to its spring game. Alabama was ranked No. 17 on Oct. 21, the day after it beat Tennessee 41-17, the Tide's largest margin of victory in that series since 1986.

But today, the 6-6 Crimson Tide own a four-game losing streak. On Nov. 17, it lost to UL-Monroe, its first defeat ever to a Sun Belt Conference Team. Alabama also lost its final three last year, then lost to Oklahoma State in the 2006 Independence Bowl.

It's hard to gauge how thrilled Tide players are about being in Shreveport. Again.

"Toward the end we kind of went downhill," senior Alabama receiver D.J. Hall said. "Things didn't turn out the way



Colorado linebacker Jordon Dizon speaks during a press conference Saturday at Independence Stadium in Shreveport, La. The Buffs will take on Alabama today in the Independence Bowl. **Lewis Geyer / Times-Call**

we wanted it to, but everything happens for a reason, so we ended up here in Shreveport and we're going to make the best of it."

Said defensive end Wallace Gilbert: "It's not like we intentionally lost the last four games to end up in Shreveport."

As to whether the SEC is superior to the Big 12, not every Buff was willing to concede so.

"I feel like that's be pretty difficult to prove," CU defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "I don't know how you prove that. I guess it's up to sports writers."

Today, the players will have a say.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, December 31,
2007

TIMES-CALL

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For Buffaloes, idle time might yield creativity

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

SHREVEPORT, La. — Colorado plays its first football game today since Nov. 23. Has idle time led to creative minds?

CU offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said coaches have to guard against putting too much thought into today's game plan and play calls in the Independence Bowl against Alabama (6 p.m., ESPN). But Helfrich suggested we'll see the offense try a few things today that it hasn't before.

"We try to do what we're good at," Helfrich said. "We try to accentuate that stuff.

"But at the same time, when you have the advance time for preparation, you try to put some wrinkles in that maybe they haven't seen. And I'm sure they (Alabama) are doing the same thing."

CU coach Dan Hawkins said the offense is always trying to evolve and remain liquid. He was less convincing as Helfrich about the possibility of cooking up something special for the Crimson Tide.

"We'll see," Hawkins said. "It's like Thanksgiving — you think you have a good recipe, and your relatives walk away with stomach pain. I think that's part of it

"You come in with a good play and think it's going to work and you hope it's going to work and you feel like it's going to work. Some days it does, and some days it doesn't."

Helfrich said the more pressing concern is the game of "What if?" After studying a season's worth of Alabama games, the Buffs are wondering what if the Tide tries something from the second week of the season, for example, that it hasn't used since.

"We have to count on our guys to play their rules and have confidence in what we're trying to do," Helfrich said.

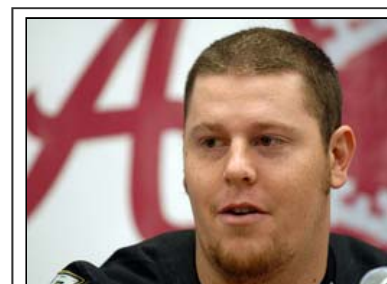
CU SPREAD OFFENSE? Asked if CU could experiment in spring drills with elements of the spread offense, which many Big 12 teams successfully use, Helfrich said, "We'll experiment with a lot of things in the spring."

Helfrich said spread offenses need athletic quarterbacks who can take a lot of hits. Whether Cody Hawkins or other CU quarterbacks fit that mold is debatable. Hawkins showed he can play through a tough hit at Texas Tech, when he was flattened early in the first quarter and went the rest of the way with a concussion.

Helfrich also pointed out quarterbacks like Dennis Dixon, whose Oregon Ducks missed him badly after he suffered an injury.

"It's not our philosophy to put that guy at risk so many times during a game," Helfrich said. "There are certainly some things you can do different that are elements of that without getting the quarterback hit that many times."

DIZON THE FREAK: CU linebacker Jordon Dizon plays his last game as a Buff today. He leaves the program ranked



Colorado offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus talks Saturday during a press conference. **Lewis Geyer / Times-Call**

fourth in total tackles with 440 and first in solo tackles, 293. Senior offensive lineman Tyler Polumbus described Dizon at Saturday's news conference.

"He is everywhere," Polumbus said. "There is not a play he is not in on. I think he's made every tackle that's ever been made.

"I don't know how he does it. The kid's a freak. He knows how to read offense better than anyone I've ever seen."

EXTRA POINTS: Ralphie IV arrived at Independence Stadium on Saturday morning and made a practice run. ... Both teams held closed walk-throughs Saturday in their final on-field preparations.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.



Hawkins lifts Colorado out of turmoil

December 30, 2007

By Brian Vernellis

bvernellis@gannett.com

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When the Colorado football program was embroiled in a national scandal in 2005, university officials selected a coach who exhibited the business approach to athletics like Pat Riley and the Zen-like philosophy of Phil Jackson.

They hired Dan Hawkins from Boise State to correct the ills that seeped into the program. In 2004, a Boulder County district attorney believed the team used sex and alcohol to lure recruits.

The comments sparked an investigation into her allegations and also shed light on the accusations of nine women, including former place kicker Katie Hnida, that they had been raped by Colorado players since 1997. Dan Hawkins stepped into this maelstrom and began righting the reeling program. Colorado faces Alabama in tonight's Independence Bowl.



Colorado coach Dan Hawkins (left) came to Boulder with the reputation of an offensive genius and a fun-loving free spirit. (Shane Bevel/The Times)

"I have never really cared about what happened the year before," Hawkins told USA Today in 2006. "You just try to look at things with a fresh view and go, 'Hey, we need to fix the grass on the practice field,' or 'The locks are broken on the door.'"

For a highly successful coach like Hawkins, his first season with the Buffaloes was unlike any he experienced as a coach. At Boise State, he built the Broncos into a Western Athletic Conference power, claiming four conference titles in his five seasons.

In his first year, the Buffaloes finished 2-10 for their worst season in 22 years and just the third 10-loss season in the program's 117 seasons.

At the season-ending news conference, a media member asked him how he would grade his performance. Hawkins fired back with "an F."

"For me, for most of my career I have just been used to either being in the playoffs or playing in a bowl game," Hawkins said.

"It is like anything else, you get used to doing something then all of a sudden you are saying 'Pff, I'm not playing,' and that is hard because you are so used to doing that."

Fixing the Buffaloes would take more than introducing new schemes. Hawkins had to change the way of thinking in Boulder, and it wasn't restricted to players.

When he first arrived on campus, he contacted alumni and boosters in a massive letter and e-mail campaign. He embraced the school's location, its academic reputation and the football program's recent string of success — a national title in 1990, a 1994 Heisman Trophy winner (Rashaan Salam) and four Big 12 North titles in five seasons.

"It took a while for guys to get used to a new coaching staff, a new scheme, a new everything," cornerback Terrence Wheatley said.

"We changed the way we eat, the way we dress. Especially for the newer guys, it was a bit more difficult. And the older guys are used to the other coaching staff, so they're a bit more rebellious. We finally figured it out."

Players quickly adopted Hawkins' Zen-like philosophies. Books like "Soul of the Samurai," "The Management Method of Jesus" and "Overachievement: The New Model for Exceptional Performance," populate his reading list.

To emphasize to his players the ideals of stretching their boundaries, he once showed video of him skydiving with his daughters. Not an easy task for someone uneasy with heights like Hawkins.

"Some of it was physical, some of it was mental, some of it was emotional in what they went through and trying to get through that," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said. "Hawk is the perfect guy for that. He's very smart and gets people."

"He gets sports people, he gets academic people. He can get everybody to circle the wagons and get them going in the right direction. That is what's started to happen across the whole scope of Boulder, Denver and Colorado football."

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Bufs' Wheatley thrives on island

Senior corner excels in one-on-one coverage.

December 30, 2007

By Brian Vernellis

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Colorado cornerback Terrence Wheatley affords a lot of freedom to his teammates. The Buffaloes defense knows with Wheatley locking down his man on the outside, the game is a lot easier.

"You look at the corner, and you know you're safe over there," linebacker Jordon Dizon said.

"He's got the speed and athleticism. He's like a secure deal over there. He gives your defense a lot of confidence."

Wheatley, a 5-foot-10, 175-pound product of Richardson, Texas, has earned a reputation throughout the Big 12 as one of the best. He sealed his senior season as a candidate for the Thorpe Award, given to the nation's best defensive back, and became a two-time all-Big 12 selection.

"I'm a very calm player," Wheatley said. "I don't really get rattled or too excited. I don't get too high or too low. I keep real levelheaded."

"If you complete a pass, I highly suggest not running the same route."

He's got an excellent chance of going on the first day of the NFL Draft, most likely in the second round. But, he has one last challenge as a Buffalo before departing for the professional ranks.

"When pro scouts come by, I just jump on the table for that guy," coach Dan Hawkins told the Denver Post. "He is a special player."

His career statistics are impressive, considering most offensive coordinators shy away from his side of the field.

For the second straight season, he intercepted five passes, falling two short of the Colorado single-season record. He's got 14 career picks which is also two shy of the Buffaloes' career mark.

"Fourteen for a career isn't too bad," Wheatley said. "I thought I had a chance to tie or break the record in a single season. Having two seasons with five back-to-back isn't too bad at all."

He's also one of the game's best return men. He inherited his speed from his parents who ran track at Arizona State. Track nearly became his choice, but the passion for football was too overwhelming.

He's returned 37 kickoffs for a total of 919 yards, including a 68-yard return against Colorado State in the season opener.

"He does get put out on the island a lot," defensive coordinator Ron Collins said. "We're not afraid of putting him out there by himself."

"He's got good vertical speed. He's got good experience and is a tough kid, battling through a lot of injuries. When he's out there, guys feel confident."

Injuries have pestered him through his time at Colorado. He's had four surgeries on his wrist in five seasons, injuring it first in 2004 and finishing the season without surgery.

Surgeons implanted a titanium plate to fortify the wrist in 2005, but it meant immobilizing his arm for part of the year. Amazingly, the plate cracked in 2006, forcing another surgery.

Late this season, he sustained a fractured bone in his foot and missed the final two games of the regular season. He said his foot is still a little sore, but he should be ready for the Independence Bowl.

He hasn't rested on his physical abilities either. A detailed student of the game, Wheatley spends hours poring over game film.

By the numbers

Terrence Wheatley started 10 games this season for the Buffaloes.

Opponent Tackles PBU INT

Col. State 6 0 1

Ariz. State 1 2 1

Fla. State 2 1 0

Miami (Ohio) 1 3 0

Oklahoma 3 1 0

Baylor 4 1 0

Kan. State 7 1 0

Kansas 6 0 0

Texas Tech 7 1 3

Missouri 5 0 0

Iowa State DNP

Nebraska DNP

Totals 42 10 5

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With the school term over, Wheatley has done little else besides watch Alabama over and over.

"It's a chance to get better," he said. "If I can get a chance to go out and expose somebody, why not?"

"Watching film is almost like cheating, if you watch enough of it. They show you all their stuff through the course of the season."

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Buffaloes' confidence grew in 2007 season

Colorado rebounds from 2-10 record in 2006.

December 30, 2007

By Brian Vernellis

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Colorado head coach Dan Hawkins could single out few positives from Colorado's 2006 season. In his first year with the program, the Buffaloes finished 2-10 for their worst season in 22 years and just the third 10-loss season in the program's 117 seasons.

At the season-ending news conference, a media member asked him how he would grade his performance. Hawkins fired back with "an F." For the 2007 campaign, ambitions were high with one season under his system.

"I don't think there was anything that we really discovered because we already had a pretty good handle on what we need to do to get better and why things didn't work out last year," Hawkins said.

"A lot of things that we did in the offseason were just in terms of being a little more demanding and really emphasizing the finer points of everything from academics to strength and conditioning."

With Hawkins' son, Cody, a redshirt freshman, at quarterback, the Buffaloes pieced together a 6-6 season with an overtime win against rival Colorado State, an upset over No. 3 Oklahoma and a quality victory over Texas Tech headlining the season.

The reward for its turnaround comes Sunday when Colorado makes its third bowl appearance in four seasons against Alabama in the PetroSun Independence Bowl. The Buffaloes have made strides this season, but Hawkins knows there's still a long road ahead.

"You are never where you think you should be," Hawkins said. "I mean I think we should be in the national championship game; I'm just used to shooting for the stars in that way.

"That being said, we are making progress and you understand the elements you are dealing with, both tangible and intangible and clearly the facilities upgrades, the influx of talent and the increased support all mean a lot. We are pushing in the right direction."

The 2007 season began with the Buffaloes avenging their 2006 loss to in-state rival Colorado State. Kicker Kevin Eberhart, who saw little time behind two-time All-American Mason Crosby, finally had his moment with a 35-yard field goal in overtime.

It was a victory in more ways than one.

"We won that first game against rival CSU, and that was a big statement that we answered after losing to them last year," running back Hugh Charles said. "That was first and foremost a game we had to win to build our confidence up."

Colorado stumbled the next two weeks, losing to Arizona State and Florida State, before rebounding with a dominating effort against Miami (Ohio).

Game No. 5, a 27-24 win over Oklahoma, marked the defining moment for Hawkins' program. Eberhart rose to the challenge again, kicking a 45-yard field goal as time expired.

"What pleased me most is the pick-up from last year," Eberhart said. "We really struggled with the new coaching stuff, and the transition was a little rough for guys who had been here through other coaching staffs.

"This year, we were much better prepared and more in line with the system in place here. It's really setting the table for good things to come in the future."

Colorado improved to 4-2 with a win over Baylor at the midway point of the season. Things were looking up for the Buffaloes.

Instead, they closed the season with losses in four of their final six games, including a 47-20 trouncing by Kansas State, a home loss to No. 15 Kansas and a crushing 55-10 defeat to No. 9 Missouri.

The only wins in the season's final weeks came against Texas Tech and the season finale over Nebraska.

"Last year, we struggled, and we hit a learning curve in the middle of the season," linebacker Jordon Dizon said. "We dropped down a little bit.

"This year, every adversity we had, we pushed through. We matured a lot. We know how to get things done."

The comfort level grew as more players found their places and roles in Hawkins' system.

"The communication has improved because we run different plays each week," Cody Hawkins said. "We game plan a lot. As long as guys know exactly what they're doing and a lot of that stems from me. You're going to play your best when you know exactly what you're doing and have 100 percent confidence. That gives you the best chance to win."

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Cody Hawkins grows as Buffaloes' leader

December 30, 2007

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Cody Hawkins' goal for the 2007 Colorado season was a simple one.

"I just wanted to go out and win every game," he said.

That's a pretty hefty one, particularly for a redshirt freshman who made his first start at quarterback against one of the Buffaloes' heated rivals, Colorado State on Sept. 1. But then, Hawkins rarely knew defeat growing up in Idaho.

From the time he played Pop Warner through high school when he was the Gatorade Player of the Year for Idaho, he never lost a game, going 59-0.

That streak came to an end in his second career start, but the 2007 season was a vast improvement for the Buffaloes over the 2-10 mark in 2006 and marked a season of growth for the young quarterback.

"I'm definitely taking care of the ball better, and I'm smarter," he said. "I wanted to use my feet in the pocket a bit more, not necessarily running for yards, but buying time to figure things out.

"Also, commanding the huddle has helped me out in making sure everybody hears me and knows their assignment."

At 5-foot-11, 190 pounds, Hawkins isn't the typical Football Bowl Subdivision quarterback. Having your dad as the head coach makes the journey and development process a bit easier too.

Cody never had his dad, Dan Hawkins, as a head coach until he arrived in Boulder. The transition from father to coach has been smooth.

"I understand how he wants things done, and what people should act like when they come into his system," the younger Hawkins said. "That's definitely helped me a lot, and he's handled it very well as being a father and a coach.

"At the house, he'll give me some pointers if I have a specific question, but other than that, he's a dad at home and a coach in the office. If I'm having school issues or an issue with a friend, he's always there for me."

Dan Hawkins realizes his son has faced immense scrutiny since being named the starter in August. Father and son are believed to be the first starting quarterback-head coach tandem since Rodney Bryant played for Ohio University coach Cleve Bryant in 1989 and 1990.

"He knows he has a long ways to go and the other side of it is that I am just real proud of how he has handled it," Dan Hawkins said.

"Being the coach's kid and being under fire at some points, and the other side of it, people being overly excited about his play. He has been good about being stable the whole time."

There was a rough five-week stretch of the season where his touchdown-to-interception ratio was an unimpressive 9 to 10. He rushed throws and tried to create plays when nothing was available.

But, he closed the final four games by throwing six touchdowns to one pick.

"Cody's biggest problem is his last name, and the expectations that we have for a kid like that," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said.

"He's a freshman, and he made some freshman mistakes, but he's responded. He had a lull in the middle of the season and was trying to make some plays that weren't there. He's a very smart player and very accurate. He needs to be that guy, nothing more, nothing less."

Since the offseason, he's been winning over teammates with his confidence in game situations.

By the numbers

Cody Hawkins started all 12 games for Colorado at quarterback this season.

Opponent C-A-I YDS TD

Col. State 18-31-1 201 2

Ariz. State 16-43-1 162 1

Fla. State 34-53-2 306 1

Miami (Ohio) 19-30-2 275 2

Oklahoma 22-36-2 220 2

Baylor 17-26-1 293 2

Kan. State 19-41-3 223 1

Kansas 27-44-2 287 2

Texas Tech 15-26-0 123 2

Missouri 12-25-1 100 0

Iowa State 23-40-0 262 2

Nebraska 17-29-0 241 2

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"He played his best whenever he was comfortable in the pocket, and we blocked our best," senior running back Hugh Charles said.

"It was great to see him comfortable in the pocket. He knows the offense like the back of his hand. This is his dad's offense, and he's grown up with it.

"Everybody knew he knew what he was doing and trusted in that. We just had to do our part to protect him and let him get the job done."

Nothing impressed his father more about his composure, his toughness or his competitiveness than a big hit he sustained against Texas Tech.

"That first shot he took against Texas Tech, he pretty much got knocked out; he didn't remember the rest of the game," Dan Hawkins said.

"He played the rest of the game with a Kleenex stuck up his nose, and he didn't make a big deal of it, and I didn't make a big deal of it, but I was really thinking to myself, 'That's pretty good, that is pretty tough right there.'"

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