



Hawkins ready for second season

Bufs open vs. rival Colorado State today in Denver

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer

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He's been in Boulder for nearly two years as head coach of the Colorado football team. Yet, he's still making small discoveries almost every day that slow the fight to get the Buffs back to the top of the heap in the Big 12 Conference.

Another in a long list of firsts came for coach Dan Hawkins just this week, only a few days from the first game of his second season, which begins bright and early this morning at Invesco Field in Denver when the Buffs take on Colorado State in the season opener for both teams (10 a.m., Fox Sports Net).

Hawkins arrived at the CU practice fields earlier this week and found the black gates locked. He realized he didn't have a key and had to wait to be let in. Hawkins says he has stumbled across hundreds of similar small details over the past 21 months, everything from locked gates to computer problems, and finding solutions to all those issues has been a challenge in getting the program turned around.

There is plenty left to accomplish, but Hawkins expects to be able to spend more time simply focused on the job he was hired to do this year, now that so much of minutiae has been addressed.

"I think when you're able to get some of that out of the way, in that sophomore year you're able to kind of focus on more things that really significantly affect your football team," Hawkins said.

Former Colorado coach Gary Barnett once said he believed the second season after a coaching change was more difficult than the first. That doesn't seem possible at CU after a 2-10 campaign in 2006.

Barnett's second season in 2000 (3-8) was worse than his first (7-5). Of the nine previous CU coaches before Hawkins, three had more losses in the second year, three had more wins, two had the same record and one didn't return to coach a second year.

Six of the current Big 12 coaches won more games in their second year than they did in their first and three others matched their first-year win total. When Hawkins heard that stat this week he had only one word to say.

"Nice."

CU fans will be able to judge for themselves today just how much progress Hawkins and his staff have made in ironing out the kinks that led to one of three 10-loss seasons in the program's history a year ago. They will also be able to finally judge for themselves the talent level of many of the players Hawkins has added to the program in the past two recruiting classes.

Some of those players will make their debuts today as true freshmen, redshirt freshmen and junior college transfers. And they include Hawkins' oldest son, Cody, who will make his first start as the Buffs' quarterback.

Cody Hawkins might be a redshirt freshman but he is a cool customer possessing the poise of a seasoned veteran. He hasn't lost a game as the starting quarterback since a fifth-grade flag football game, a span of 59 contests.

Colorado State coach Sonny Lubick has heard about the kid's leadership qualities and his ability to focus, but Lubick figures to test them anyway. Conventional wisdom dictates that defenses pressure young signal-callers until they prove they can handle it and make you pay for it.

Cody Hawkins doesn't seem concerned.

"It's a big stadium, and I'm going to throw on my headphones, watch some film and talk to my teammates and just get ready to go out and play," he said. "I know they're going to come out in front of me. My line is going to play their hearts out, my wideouts and my running backs, and the defense is going to play well, too.

"I just have to relax and execute my assignments that the coaches have been teaching me all year, ever since I stepped on campus. I've got no doubt we'll do that."

His son is just one of as many as 15 freshmen who could play for the first time today for Dan Hawkins, and the coach admits he has taken a different approach to his players this year than he did last season because the Buffs are so young. Hawkins said he has been tougher on the team leading up to today, especially his youngsters.

"I just want every single guy to know what we need out of them, what we think they can do, what we want them to do, what they have to do for us to be successful," Hawkins said.

CSU quarterback Caleb Hanie was as poised as Joe Montana in this game last season, completing 20 of 23 passes for 233 yards. It might have been Hanie's best day in a 4-8 season that included a seven-game losing streak to close out the year.

The CU defense must do a much better job to have a chance to win today.

The Buffs also will face CSU running back Kyle Bell this season, after getting a reprieve from 235-pound bruiser a year ago, when a knee injury sidelined Bell for the season. The Buffs believe they are up to the challenge because they know their assignments better now.

A year in the system surviving all the potholes they have come across has given the Buffs a sense of confidence they lacked in this game a year ago. They believe it will help them today.

But now it's time to prove it.

"From the experience of going through a season like 2-10, you appreciate and value the little things, the details, and you realize how those details help you win football games," defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "So 2-10 is going to eventually lead to 10-2. That's what came from it. The motivation to take care of all those details, to maybe log an extra hour here or there."



Colorado vs. Colorado St. matchups

By Kyle Ringo

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CU RUN OFFENSE VS. CSU RUN DEFENSE — CU features two new guards and a center playing his first game at the position. It also has a new offensive line coach. It might take some time for the group to gel. There are bound to be some growing pains. However, the line performed pretty well in fall scrimmages and the Buffs have at least three capable tailbacks, including senior Hugh Charles, who only needs a little daylight to do a lot of damage. CSU gave up 150 yards a game and 21 touchdowns on the ground last year but figures to be better with plenty of experience returning on defense. **Edge: EVEN.**

CU PASS OFFENSE VS. CSU PASS DEFENSE — CU looks like it will improve dramatically in this area over 2006, but the Buffs have to prove it on the field before they earn the edge in this category. They were one of the worst passing teams in Division I football last year. So they have a lot of ground to make up, but we think they will be much more effective throwing this year than they were in this game last year. Still, CSU had the 28th ranked passing defense a year ago and there are plenty of experienced players back from that group. Only a fool gives the edge to CU here. **Edge: CSU.**

CSU RUN OFFENSE VS. CU RUN DEFENSE — The Rams suffered through last season without star tailback Kyle Bell, but it's hard to believe even Bell would have been able to make this group that much better. The Rams simply weren't a good running team a year ago, finishing 113th in the nation. The Rams have a new group playing their first game together at offensive line and they also figure to have a few growing pains. Bell is back and will make them better, but we'd be surprised to see them dominate. CU was inconsistent against the run in 2006 and still finished 30th in the nation, and the Buffs were facing much better competition each week than the ground games in the Mountain West Conference. CU should be good against the run again. This is a slight edge for the Buffs. **Edge: CU.**

CSU PASS OFFENSE VS. CU PASS DEFENSE — CSU quarterback Caleb Hanie was great against the Buffs last year completing 20 of 23 passes for 233 yards. Having Bell back in the offense should allow the Rams to return to more of their usual play-action passing, and that should give Hanie more time to look down field this year. He hasn't been a world beater so far in his career with 21 touchdown passes and 19 interceptions but he has earned the edge here based on last year's performance alone. The Buffs struggled all season and made a habit of making quarterbacks look good, allowing a 67 percent completion rate in 2006. They say they have improved, but just like the CU pass offense, they have to prove it on the field. **Edge: CSU.**

SPECIAL TEAMS — One of the biggest changes to the rules this season was moving kickoffs back five yards. They will originate from the 30-yard line this season, meaning there should be more kickoffs returned for touchdowns and offenses should benefit from better average starting field position. These return and coverage units were even over the course of the year in 2006. CSU place-kicker Jason Smith has more game experience than CU fifth-year senior Kevin Eberhart. Even though Smith has only made 68 percent of his attempts, he gets the nod because of experience. We'll give the edge in punting to CU sophomore Matt DiLallo. **Edge: EVEN.**

PREDICTION — Colorado State 28-27. CU misses possible game-winning field goal.

— **Kyle Ringo**



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CU-CSU rivalry bigger than ever

Bufs are 50-50 in past 8 games against Rams

By Laura-Claire Corson Camera Staff Writer
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When Colorado running backs coach Darian Hagan pumps up the Buffaloes for today's Rocky Mountain Showdown, he only has to say one thing.

"I always tell our guys that I never lost to Colorado State," said Hagan, who quarterbacked the Bufs from 1989 to 1991 — a time when the team was undefeated against the Rams and won the 1990 national championship.

The Bufs played the Rams only once when Hagan was the starting quarterback — in 1989 — but CU won eight straight matchups between 1987 and 1998.

"Now, it's more 50-50," he said. "Now, it's a huge rivalry."

Indeed, the Bufs have won only four of the last eight meetings. That includes last year's 14-10 defeat — the first time in four years CU lost to CSU.

"Yeah, I don't count last year," said CU fifth-year senior Will Leary. "As far as I'm concerned, we're 3-0 against them in my time at CU."

The close competition enhances the rivalry and makes state bragging rights that much more important, Hagan said.

And fans agree.

"CSU is CU's biggest rival," said Leary, a Colorado native who has friends at CSU. "I have more connections at CSU, so it's always more fun and intense when we play them."

The close connections are one reason why rivalries bloom, said Al Figone, a former professor of sport sociology who taught at Humboldt State University. Other factors are history

(CU won 70-6 in the first-ever game in 1893) and the attention media give the game — this marks the 13th straight year the matchup has been televised either nationally or regionally.

CU and CSU lie only 55 miles from each other. Boulder County's 14 high schools sent 1,091 undergraduate students to CSU last year, said Mary Ontiveros, executive director of admissions at CSU.

CSU senior Justin Marinelli grew up as a Bufs fan in Boulder — attending his first game when he was just 5. Most of his high school friends attend CU, so the game always brings laid-back taunting, said

Marinelli, a converted CSU fan.

“It was pretty easy to make the switch because you just tend to kind of lean the way of the school you go to — especially with all the hype the game brings and the excitement you share with the other students,” he said. “It’s hard not to roll with the Rams.”

The Buffs are no longer in easy-win territory with the Rams — and haven’t been for about 10 years, said Jashon Sykes, assistant director of recruiting at CU and a former Buffs linebacker.

Buffs fans “lived” for the Nebraska game when Sykes donned a CU uniform from 1998 to 2001 —the fact that it’s a conference game helps explain that rivalry.

However, the CSU game has gradually gained momentum, said both Hagan and Sykes.

“The fire has slowly been building,” Hagan said. “It’s a friendly rivalry, but we want to win. Badly.”

For current CU students, the fire has been present since they stepped onto CU’s campus. Nicole Stutzman, a junior from Pueblo, said the CSU game is “bigger than the other games.”

“(The Rams) are our rivals,” she said. “I’m really excited.”



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Baines: TV work reunites Joel Klatt with Buffs

By Gary Baines

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Being the starting quarterback for the previous coach, Joel Klatt made it a point last year of giving new coach Dan Hawkins and his Colorado football team some space.

But now that he's about 21 months removed from the last game he played for CU, Klatt feels comfortable re-establishing close ties to the program. With an expanding role at Fox Sports Net giving him a ready-made reason if he needed one, Klatt won't be a stranger at Buff functions this season.

Klatt started the process earlier this year in handling an FSN special on CU's spring game. For today's telecast of the CU-Colorado State game on FSN, he'll work the pregame show (9 a.m.) and also be involved in the postgame.

In addition, he'll provide analysis from Hawkins' Tuesday press conferences this year and work any other CU pregame shows that FSN will carry. This is all on top of the 12 Colorado high school football games Klatt is scheduled to broadcast this season.

Regarding his presence at CU after playing for the Buffs from 2002-05, Klatt said, "Last year, I tried to distance myself and let them have their space. Being a three-year player, I tried not to always be around. But as time goes on, I'm going to try to be around the program more. I think they're going in the right direction."

Klatt had hoped to play in the pros after leaving CU, and though he received opportunities in 2006 from both the New Orleans Saints and Detroit Lions, he didn't stick. He's no longer actively pursuing a pro career; instead, he lives in Highlands Ranch and works with private equities in real estate while dabbling in broadcasting.

"It's a terrific way to stay around the game and to get a little work on the side," he said of his TV duties. "I really enjoy it. It's very interesting to look at it from a two-team perspective as opposed to the way a player or a fan does. It's a great dynamic. I especially like the high school brand of football (Joel's dad, Gary, was a prep coach for 30 years). It's extremely fun."

Klatt went into TV work by happenstance. One week, CU sports information director Dave Plati couldn't fill his usual role on the Altitude network's "College Football Summit" show, so he asked Klatt to sub for him. The next week, a representative from FSN gave Klatt a call, and a sidelight was born.

"It's blossomed into a nice relationship," said Klatt, who also did analysis for some Colorado Crush telecasts during the spring.

As for the college end of things, Klatt knows more than a little about CU-CSU matchups. Indeed, the three games Klatt started against the Rams, the Buffs went 3-0, and he threw for 402 yards in the 2003 game.

"The start of the football season is always exciting, though it's a little different than when you're playing," he said. "I'm a Buff through and through, and this is such an important game for CU. It's very important that they get off to a good start."

"The first game is always tough. It's so hard to rein in your emotions because you've looked forward to the game for so long. A lot of times you try to do too much. The guys who can harness (their emotion) and rein it in will be in the best shape. That, and whoever takes care of the football will come out on top."

Klatt foresees the Buffs winning four to six games this season, with an improvement at the QB position being one reason for the step up from last year's 2-10 record.

"Those two guys (Cody Hawkins and Nick Nelson) present such a cerebral edge to the quarterback position," Klatt said. "That has helped them improve dramatically in terms of execution."

Other Buffs on FSN

Klatt isn't the only former CU football player working for FSN this fall. Also filling the bill are Alfred Williams and Jay Leeuwenburg, who will team with former Bronco Bill Romanowski on "Football Playbook" (debuts Wednesday at 10 p.m.). Like Klatt, Williams will also be an analyst for FSN's high school football games.

Media miscues

KOA radio talk show host Mike Rosen, speaking Monday about Michael Vick, noted that he (Rosen) wasn't a Philadelphia Eagles fan. That's an interesting sidenote, but seeing that Vick quarterbacked the Atlanta Falcons, it should be noted that not all birds are the same. ... On Thursday, KKFN radio's Scott Hastings was criticizing Boulder for its lack of community support for the CU football team. That's a legitimate point of contention, except when Hastings implied — at least until apparently being informed otherwise later in his show — that Boulder didn't even have pep rallies for the team. Well, if Hastings hasn't been there to see them, they must not have occurred. I just wonder what you call those fan events that have drawn large crowds to Boulder's Pearl Street mall on Friday nights before home games the last two years.

Channel surfing

The first Big 12 Showcase of the school year (today at 8:30 a.m. on FSN) previews the CU-CSU game, which will kick off at 10 a.m. on FSN. Joel Meyers will handle play-by-play for the game telecast, with former New York Giants linebacker Gary Reasons providing analysis. ... TV trivia: The 2004 CU-CSU game — won 27-24 by CU — drew the highest TV ratings ever for a college football game on FSN.



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