



Buff 'D' passes film study class with flying colors

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Everybody studies film in college football, but few devour it at the rate the Colorado defense seems to be.

Improved preparation has led to an eye-opening run over the past three games. The Buffs have held Florida State, Miami (Ohio) and Oklahoma to a combined 590 total yards and 40 points.

It is the first time in 41 years CU has held three consecutive opponents to fewer than 600 combined yards from scrimmage.

Film study was an area of considerable disappointment when coach Dan Hawkins and his assistants took over the program in 2006. Nights with plenty of empty chairs in coaches offices and meeting rooms were the norm.

It has been emphasized ad nauseam since Hawkins' arrival and now a player who doesn't watch film stands out in the locker room. It has finally produced results over the first month of Year Two.

"I feel like this year it's everyone who is on the defense, either starting or backing up, is watching film to the point where they know every little nuance," linebacker Brad Jones said. "They know the characteristics of an offensive lineman's stances and stuff.

"Everybody is just dedicated to learning what they need to do. It's cool. It's so cool."

The Buffs have improved to No. 14 in the nation in total defense going into this week's game at Baylor (5:05 p.m., no television). They also rank 14th in pass defense, which should be a factor against the Bears, who like to throw the ball from spread formations as much as 50 times a game.

The Buffs allowed a season-high 269 yards passing in a loss four weeks ago at Arizona State. Since that game, they haven't allowed an opponent to sniff the 200-yard mark through the air.

They have given up 126, 95 and 112 passing yards in the past three games against teams that had enjoyed success in the passing game prior to meeting the Buffs.

Hawkins credited defensive coordinator Ron Collins for his game plans and the level of detail defensive coaches emphasize with players. He said Collins is adept at adding new wrinkles each week as the season progresses to confuse offenses.

"They're seeing how all the little dinky things fit together," Hawkins said. "And it truly is an 11-man defense. There is a certain amount of communication that has to go on, and there is a certain amount of checking that goes on.

"So there are a lot of little buttons and things that have to get turned to get it right."

The Buffs have made dramatic improvements across the board on defense, and a few areas stick out when compared with their performance last season when they were still trying to learn the fundamentals of Collins' approach.

The Buffs allowed teams to complete nearly 67 percent of their passes in 12 games in 2006. Through the first five games this season, they are allowing a 49.6 completion rate. They are the only team in the Big 12 conference holding teams to less than a 50 percent completion rate.

"I think Ron and the guys are doing a great job of putting together the game plan and looking at what people do and trying to matchup to that," Hawkins said.

"Coach (Greg) Brown (CU's secondary coach) can tell them a hundred times that they need to be two yards off the hash mark and finally when they get two yards off the hash mark and it works like he told them it was going to work, then you go, 'Wow, OK, I guess I can't be one yard or three yards. I guess it's got to be two yards.' Then people start locking in on that."

The Buffs received considerable criticism last year for their inability to stop teams in third downs consistently. CU allowed a 48 percent conversion rate on third downs last season.

This year they rank third in the Big 12, allowing teams to convert on third down only 29 percent of the time.

"There is no secret," cornerback Terrence Wheatley said. "If you look at what we do, we don't do a whole lot. We don't have a whole bunch of calls. We know our calls really well and we're students of the game."

Success leads to more eager faces looking to improve in the film room.

"It just tumbles," Jones said. "It's like a big snowball, like the more we get it, the more we want to get it and do more."

Notable

The Big 12 Conference announced the Buffs' game Oct. 13 at Kansas State will be televised nationally on ESPN2 and will begin at 7:15 (MDT). It is fifth of the Buffs first seven games to be televised either regionally or nationally. ... CU punt return man Chase McBride was named Big 12 special teams player of the week after returning five punts for 87 yards. His 31-yard return in the final minutes set up the game-winning field goal. ... Fox Sports Net will rebroadcast the CU-Oklahoma game today beginning at 7 p.m.



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Woelk: This is pivotal moment for CU

By Neill Woelk

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Upon further review ...

With apologies to Dan Hawkins, who knows better than to revel or wallow in the past, it's hard to look ahead to Baylor without taking one last look at Colorado's stunning 27-24 win over Oklahoma.

While it was no doubt one of the biggest victories in years at Folsom Field — perhaps the biggest ever in terms of an underdog knocking off a heavy favorite — we're still hesitant to call it a defining moment.

The trouble with such a term is there's no way to say what the win defined.

If the Buffs turn around and fall flat against Baylor this weekend, the win over OU will be nothing more than a fluke.

If the Buffs don't continue to improve and knock out at least four or five more wins this year, it will be a highlight, not a turning point.

But if the Buffs do what Bill McCartney's team did after its win over No. 3 Nebraska in 1986, it will certainly be a defining moment, the day people remember as the moment Hawk's program turned the corner.

Mac was in his fifth year when he finally beat Nebraska. His record up to that point at CU was 16-34-1.

From that day on, Mac rolled out a 77-21-4 record, including a 4-2 finish to the 1986 season.

Buff fans can only hope that Saturday's win will someday have a similar definition. ...

There's no doubt, though, that the victory should have an immediate impact on the program.

Certainly, it should be a help to recruiting. Any Colorado prep standout who saw that game couldn't help but be impressed. Ditto with out-of-state stars who were waiting to see whether this team could show some tangible improvement.

But the win should also be a boon in the fundraising department.

Oftentimes, boosters who have the ability to donate large sums of money look at their contributions just as they would an investment in a company. When it becomes apparent a company is improving — i.e. when the stock is rising — it's a wise investment.

In that vein, one can certainly say Saturday's win is a sign that CU football stock is on the rise.

Bottom line: Those are the kinds of wins that can have a substantial long-term effect, not just on the football program, but on the entire athletic department, and even the university. ...

Meanwhile, here's one more bit of praise for Hawk and his staff, whose game plan against the bigger, faster and stronger Sooners was masterful.

Woelk: This is pivotal moment for CU

Understand that the Sooners' lineup is liberally peppered with four- and five-star recruits. Meanwhile, as more than one person has pointed out since the win, CU's starting lineup had far less "star power" and far more walk-ons and former walk-ons on the field.

Two lessons to be learned: One, while the recruiting rankings might be a decent gauge, they are by no means a guarantee of anything but a team with good athletes.

Two, coaching always makes the difference. ...

And finally, it was interesting to speak with Buff safety Ryan Walters after the game. Walters' father, Marc, is a former Buff quarterback who played for McCartney's teams in the late 1980s.

"I've been waiting for a chance like this since I got here," the younger Walters said. "Having my dad play in what they call the 'glory days,' and being around that atmosphere ... this is exactly what it felt like when I was 4 or 5 years old.

"After the game, it was so emotional. I saw Kanavis (McGhee) and Deion Figures (both ex-Buffs), and they were so excited. It meant a lot to them to be able to see us bringing the program back like this."

And, Walters also offered this little bit of wisdom that he no doubt picked up from Hawkins.

"This is only important if we keep it up," he said. "We have to be a mature team. There's a long season ahead of us, and a lot of goals we still can reach. We can't stop now."



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BIG 12 NOTES

North surprises with key upsets

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Has the North risen again?

Big 12 Conference football coaches said Monday on their weekly teleconference that it's probably too early to determine whether the recent dominance of the South Division has begun to erode. But in any case, the surprise victories last weekend by Colorado and Kansas State indicate the North is making progress.

Colorado's homecoming victory over then-No. 3 Oklahoma and Kansas State winning on the road over then-No. 7 Texas took a prominent place among a parade of big upsets throughout the nation Saturday.

"I don't know how everybody perceives either division, but I can tell you this (North) side has drastically improved," said Iowa State first-year coach Gene Chizik, previously defensive coordinator at Texas.

A member of the South Division has won five of the past seven Big 12 championship games, a

streak interrupted by Colorado in 2001 and Kansas State in 2003. The South has won the past three title games by an average score of 44-4.

In head-to-head meetings during the regular season, South teams went 13-5 in 2006 and have an edge every year since 1999, when each division won nine games.

The dominance by the South became especially lopsided during the past three years when it held a 39-16 advantage.

Whether last week's wins by Colorado and Kansas State signal the beginning of a reversal in that trend remains to be seen.

"I knew there would be ups and

downs," Texas Tech coach Mike Leach said of South teams. "I didn't think anybody would go unscathed." downs," Texas Tech coach Mike Leach said of South teams. "I didn't think anybody would go unscathed."

Parity is a factor everywhere, Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy said.

"When you have only 85 scholarships and the APR (Academic Performance Rating) is a factor and the forward pass and more skilled athletes out there across the country to recruit, then there's always going to be an opportunity for anybody to win," Gundy said. "I don't think (the South's dominance) is as big a factor now."

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Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said he did not take Colorado lightly.

"I do think we have a good solid football team, but so do a lot of other teams," Stoops said Monday. "Anybody can beat anybody. The margin for winning and losing is very small."

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Footnotes

Colorado punt returner Chase McBride was selected as Big 12 special-teams player of the week by a media panel Monday. McBride, a 5-foot-7, 160-pound senior from Thornton, returned four punts a total of 87 yards in the 27-24 victory over Oklahoma. His 31-yard return set up the game-winning field goal.

"I've always had a soft spot for kids who don't always come in the same 'box' that maybe somebody else does," CU coach Dan Hawkins said, "but may have even more intangibles and are willing to work harder, be smarter, be more dedicated." ... The Oct. 13 Colorado vs. Kansas State game in Manhattan, Kan., was selected for a national ESPN2 telecast, with a kickoff of 7:15 p.m. Mountain time.

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Local college football notes

By **B.G. Brooks (CU)**, **Randy Holtz (CSU)** and **Jim Benton (Air Force)**.
October 2, 2007

CU

Pocket rocket plus

What **Chase McBride** lacks in size - he's 5-foot-7, 160 pounds - he makes up for in about every other intangible football coaches crave.

"I've got a soft spot in my heart for kids that don't come in the same box," coach **Dan Hawkins** said Monday after McBride was chosen the Big 12 Conference's special- teams player of the week.

Hawkins said McBride, whose fifth punt return Saturday went for 31 yards (five total, 87 yards) and helped set up CU's winning field goal against Oklahoma, is "smarter, tougher, more dedicated" than many players who dwarf him.

"He went out every day in the summer and caught punts," Hawkins said. "In fall camp, he didn't put a ball on the ground. . . . He's not the biggest guy around, but his consistency has been awesome for us."

It was only fitting that after Saturday's game, Hawkins announced McBride, of Broomfield, is now "a former walk-on."

Getting physical

Upon surviving the offseason work mandated by strength-and- conditioning coach **Jeff Pitman**, the Buffaloes firmly believed they would be better equipped this season as a fourth-quarter team.

The dividends apparently were obvious to the Sooners, who saw their 24-7 lead evaporate when the Buffs outscored them 20-7 in the second half, including 17-0 in the fourth quarter.

Oklahoma offensive tackle **Branndon Braxton** told *The Tulsa World*, "We haven't seen nobody as physical as Colorado. No excuses, but it caught us off guard, seeing a team that just came out and hit us back in the mouth like we'd been hitting other people.

"(Conditioning) played a big part in it."

He said it

"My wife told me after church (Sunday) night, 'You're a much better coach than you were two weeks ago.' "

Dan Hawkins, CU coach

Etc.

- CU's Oct. 13 game at Kansas State will kick off at 7:15 p.m. MDT and be televised nationally on ESPN2.
- CU received five votes in this week's Associated Press Top 25. The school's previous national ranking (No. 22) was the week of Nov. 12, 2005.
- The Buffs will be seeking their first road win (0-6) of the Hawkins era.

CSU



Doug Pensinger ©
Getty Images

Colorado defenders, clockwise from upper left, Gardner McKay, Marquez Herrod, Travis Sanderfeld and Jalil Brown gang tackle Oklahoma receiver Juaquin Iglesias during CU's 27-24 win against the No. 3 Sooners on Saturday in Boulder.