



'Tougher' Charles finding his groove

Buff gets boost from non-traditional sources

By Kyle Ringo

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There are two voices in Hugh Charles' head each time he steps on the football field.

The voice of his mother, Wendi, is the dominant one. And it should be. It's the voice he has relied on since the seconds after taking his first breath of life.

Her voice has nurtured him, encouraged him, warned him, disciplined him and cheered him on during his childhood in Texas when he tried everything from karate to flying airplanes and, of course, playing football.

It is also the voice that taught him the virtues of Buddhism, which he has come to rely on during his football career.

Before every game, Charles performs a Buddhist chant he learned long ago from his mother. Its purpose is to keep him focused and calm before and during games, which is something he struggled to do in his freshman and sophomore seasons.

New teammates might give him a perplexed look when they hear him reciting it over and over again. Veteran Buffs have grown accustomed to it.

Nam my o ho rene kyo (nam mee o ho ren gay key o).

"It helps with me not worrying about doing well and just knowing that I can do well," Charles said.

Charles grew up attending a non-denominational Christian church with his father while also learning Buddhism from his mother.

"I've always wanted my chil-dren to select what made them feel whole," his mother said.

The second voice in Charles' head belongs to Colorado running backs coach Darian Hagan. It's also a voice of encouragement — stern encouragement. It's a voice that tells Charles to run over that linebacker or safety in his way instead of running around them.

It's a voice he is finally listening to almost as much as his mom.

Charles is in the midst of the most successful stretch of his four-year career in Boulder. He has run for more than 100 yards in each of the past four games, including a career-best 171-yard effort in a loss last week at Kansas State.

He is the second-leading rusher in the Big 12 Conference in league games and is averaging six yards per carry, a full yard better than his career average coming into the season.

Hagan's voice is also the one keeping Charles grounded through this successful stretch. It's the voice telling Charles he's still not good enough. It's the voice that tells him one of the final things he must learn to become a great back is how to make the one unblocked defender in the hole miss when all the other defenders are blocked.

"My coaches used to tell me when I grew up, 'Make one guy miss in the phone booth and you're out,' " Hagan said. "Once he gets to that, he could be one of the best backs in the country."

No one within the program believes Charles has come close to reaching his potential now that he has embraced a tougher running style. Excitement swirls around him heading into the final five games of his senior season, including this week's game against Kansas, which features the No. 2 defense in the country against the run.

Kansas linebacker Joe Mortensen noticed Charles immediately in film study this week.

"Charles is a hard runner," Mortensen said. "He's quick, he's fast and he's strong. He's the best tailback we've seen all year, for sure. He'll make you miss and he'll also put his head down and try to knock you over, so he's definitely one of the best tailbacks in the Big 12 and he's a complete back. He can also catch the ball."

Hagan said he has spent years telling Charles he can't only rely on his speed, but Charles only finally embraced that message this season. And now that he has proven to himself that he can run through defenders, he's becoming tougher to bring down each week.

Charles said he can't really pinpoint a moment or conversation that led to him becoming a stronger runner. He said it's more likely a combination of all his experiences and everything he has learned over the years from his mother, Hagan, coach Dan Hawkins, former coach Gary Barnett, former running backs coach Shawn Simms and players such as former CU tailback Bobby Purify, who was the starter when Charles was a freshman.

"It is all about growing up," he said. "And playing as long as I have here, I would get little bits of information from everybody, different coaches, my mom and friends and stuff and you just soak it all up and you apply it on the field."



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Charles powering CU running game

By The Denver Post

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BOULDER Five weeks ago, Colorado's rushing attack literally went backward against Florida State. Who could have guessed the Buffaloes would make some positive news on the ground by midseason?

Hugh Charles did. The 5-foot-8, 190-pound senior speedster netted a career-best 171 yards Saturday against a Kansas State defense that entered the game ranked 20th among major-college teams in rushing yards allowed.

Charles reached 100 yards for the fourth consecutive game, the first CU player to do so since 2002 when Chris Brown reached the century mark in eight straight games.

"I knew that as soon as I got healthy, it was going to be different," Charles said Tuesday. "I'm a senior. I need to be a leader. I was the guy who was going to get (the running attack) going."

Charles strained a hamstring during the first offensive series in the opener against Colorado

State. He sat out the 33-14 loss at Arizona State, when the Buffs gained just 32 yards on 26 carries, and drew just four carries the following week when CU netted minus-27 yards on 25 carries (including sacks and a fumble recovery for a loss). Since that 16-6 loss to Florida State, CU has rushed for at least 157 yards each week.

Time change. Kickoff for Saturday's home game against No. 15 Kansas has been moved up by ESPN from 3:45 to 3:31 p.m.

- Tom Kensler

Air Force

AIR FORCE ACADEMY Coach Troy Calhoun said Tuesday tailback Chad Smith wouldn't return this week from an ankle injury that sidelined him for the Colorado State game. The Falcons didn't hurt for a rushing offense, with Chad Hall taking over and gaining an AFA-record 256 yards in the 45-21 rout of the Rams.

Kip McCarthy will get the starting call against Wyoming.

Calhoun said defensive end Jake Paulson remained questionable for Saturday's game.

Calhoun criticized the AFA defense for lack of aggressive play against the Rams.

"We have to play bigger on defense," Calhoun said. "We have to be more sudden and quicker in our play."

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