

Tigers hope to improve record

By Chuck Green
Senior Reporter

Please excuse Missouri coach Bob Stull if he seems overly optimistic. He's just happy to be undefeated so far this season.

"We won the spring game, so we're 1-0," the first-year Tigers coach said. "Now all I have to do is keep that string going."



With 15 starters back from last season's team, Stull is counting on experience and senior leadership to improve on Missouri's 3-7-1 record last season. But he knows it won't be easy.

"It's hard to tell what kind of team I've inherited until we actually get out there on the field and start playing some games," he said. "We've got some good players, but I'm not sure all the parts are there yet."

"We've got a lot of holes to fill." Stull, who transformed the Texas-El Paso program from a cellar-dwelling joke three years ago to a 10-3 bowl team last season, said one major task is to develop a quarterback for his type of offense.

Missouri ran the flexbone offense -- a derivative of the wishbone formation -- while under Woody Widenhofer's reign, but will switch to a pro-style offense this season, which was the same offense that turned the UTEP program around.

John Stollenwerck, who transferred from Southern Methodist two seasons ago, will return for his final season, and will start fall drills as the Tigers' top quarterback. Kent Kiefer also will challenge, as will incoming freshman Phil Johnson.

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Colorado coach hopes this will be the year 17 starters return for Buffs '89 season

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Rarely do a touchdown and a field goal make or break a college football team's season, but they shattered Colorado's last year.

The Buffaloes dropped a 17-14 game to Oklahoma, then lost a 7-0 thriller to Nebraska three weeks later. The losses, coupled with an earlier loss to Oklahoma State, kept Colorado from its first New Year's Day bowl appearance since its 1977 Orange Bowl loss to Ohio State.

Colorado coach Bill McCartney knows it well, too.

"Each year, we play (Nebraska and Oklahoma) closer and closer," he said. "Last year, we played them about as close as we could without beating them both."

Against Oklahoma, Colorado missed a last-second field goal that would have given the Buffs a tie.

In the Nebraska game, Colorado tailback J.J. Flannigan was on his way to a touchdown when he fumbled the ball inside the 20-yard line. In the second half, Colorado was again driving for an apparent score when quarterback Sal Aunese threw an interception.

Take away those mistakes and Colorado would have had its first Big Eight championship since it shared it with Oklahoma State and Iowa State in 1976.

And this year? "We should be impressive," he said.

The Buffaloes got off to an impressive start Monday with a 27-6 win against Texas at Boulder, Colo., during a nationally televised ESPN broadcast.

Seventeen starters return for Colorado this season, although the most important starter -- Aunese --

won't be back. Late last March, Aunese was diagnosed as having stomach cancer, which has since spread to one of his lungs.

His replacement will be Darian Hagan, a 5-foot-10, 185-pound sophomore.

Against Texas, Hagan rushed for 116 yards on 14 carries and completed 7 of 12 passes for 95 yards.

Charles Johnson, a 5-9, 165-pound sophomore, will step in if Hagan falters.

When McCartney calls a pass, the primary target will almost always be split end Jeff Campbell, a 5-9, 170-pound senior. Last season, Campbell caught 15 passes for 465 yards.

Wingback Mike Pritchard and tight end John Perak also return to their starting positions.

Last season, Colorado had the Big Eight's lowest pass completion percentage (43.2 percent) and fewest touchdown passes (5). Most of the reason for that was the success enjoyed by the Buffs' backfield. Aunese is the only starter not returning.

Eric Bienemy, a 5-6, 190-pound junior, earned All-Big Eight honors last season while rushing for 1,243 yards and 10 touchdowns. He has been named in several preseason college football magazines as an All-American in 1989.

Also returning is Flannigan, who racked up 522 yards as Bienemy's back-up last season. Junior O.C. Oliver, Colorado's leading rusher during his senior season, also will see playing time behind Bienemy.

Lead-blocking for Bienemy will be fullback Erich Kissick or George Hemmingway. Also in the picture is Michael Simmons, who started in 1987 and was suspended

from the team for disciplinary reasons last season.

Up front for the Buffaloes are four starters back from last year. The only hole is at center, where Jay Leeuwenburg, a 6-3, 255-pound sophomore, and Neil Schlessener, a 6-4, 260-pound junior will compete for the starting job.

Bill Coleman (6-5, 265) and Mark Vander Poel (6-8, 295) return to the tackle spots, while Joe Garten (6-3, 280) and Darrin Muilenburg (6-4, 280) again will clear defenders from the guard spots.

The Sporting News rated Colorado's offensive line the second-best in the country, behind that of Syracuse.

"With the development of an

'Last year, we played them (Oklahoma and Nebraska) about as close as we could without beating them both.'

—McCartney

adequate center, this line could rank as the Buffs' best of the decade," The Sporting News article says. "Garten and Muilenburg are the nation's best tandem."

Defensively, Colorado's linebacking corps also gains a No. 2 rating from The Sporting News, behind that of Southern Cal.

At the outside linebacker positions are juniors Alfred Williams and Kanavis McGhee. Known as the "H Boys" (along with defensive tackle Arthur Walker --

they're all from Houston), Williams and McGhee combined for 11 1/2 sacks, 10 tackles for losses, 13 quarterback hurries and 161 tackles, 109 of which were unassisted.

Last season, McGhee earned All-Big Eight honors and was named second-team All-American by The Sporting News, while Williams was named second-team all conference.

When opposing runners turn inside, it doesn't get any easier. Waiting for them will be Michael Jones, a 6-0, 230-pound senior who started last season, and either David Brown or Terry Johnson.

Walker will anchor the line as the only returning starter. Last season, he made 67 tackles, including 29 solos.

Joining Walker on the line will be Okland Salavea or Brad Robinson at the other tackle spot, and nose tackle Joel Steed, a 6-3, 270-pound sophomore.

The secondary returns intact, with Deon Figures and Dave McCloughan again filling the cornerback positions. The strong safety will be senior Bruce Young, while Tim James will return at free safety.

Placekicker Ken Culbertson returns, and the punting will be handled by sophomore Tom Rouen.

McCartney's goal this season, as it is every season, is to win the Big Eight championship. Beating Nebraska and Oklahoma, he said, is an "obvious obstacle."

"It's been 28 years since we've beaten them both," McCartney said. "If we are to get to the point of competing for the conference crown, we'll have to beat them both. We came close last season, but it wasn't close enough."

"Maybe this year, it will be."

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