



BIG PLAYS "NOT IN THE BOXSCORE"



Often a play takes place which makes the difference between winning and losing, but it gets lost in the shuffle and then forgotten as time passes by. The following is a listing of some of these moments and the players who created them in the history of Colorado football:

Zack Jordan, 1952 vs. Oklahoma

CU tailback Zack Jordan's powerful right leg was the Buffs' best weapon in a 21-21 tie which was the Sooners' only blemish in what was to become a 47-game undefeated string. Jordan's 72-yard quick kick to the OU 3 set up CU's first TD. His 77-yarder put the Buffs in position for their second score. For good measure he added a 78-yard boot in the fourth period which quickly produced the setting for CU's final score. It was the finest exhibition of kicking in the nation that year and earned Jordan a spot in the NCAA record book. To make his day even more impressive, he scored all three CU touchdowns.

Frank Bernardi, 1954 vs. Missouri

It was a relatively meaningless game but Frank Bernardi played to the end as though it was for the Big Seven championship. CU's chances had faded a week earlier in Boulder with a bitter last quarter 13-6 loss to Oklahoma. The Buffs struggled to a 19-13 advantage over Missouri as time ran out in Columbia. When the Tigers scored with 1:06 left the winning PAT kick seemed a certainty. But Bernardi lined up wide at left end and used his sprinter speed to deflect the ball. The effort cost him two black eyes and a broken nose and a place in the CU record book for unlikely heroes.



John Bayuk, 1956 vs. Missouri

The forearm, not the pounding legs, of fullback John (The Beast) Bayuk provided the impetus for a 14-14 tie at Missouri which ultimately sent CU to its first Orange Bowl appearance. Beaten at the wire by Oklahoma in Boulder a week earlier, the Buffs could clinch a bowl bid with at least a tie with a Tiger team which had made a living annually by catching CU down after a tough battle with OU. Predictably, the Buffs struggled in this one, trailing 14-0 late in the third period. CU scored, then recovered a fumble at the Tiger 37. But Bob Stransky fumbled on first down. At the bottom of the pile, Bayuk was bitten by a Missouri lineman. Getting a reprieve with the 15-yard penalty, CU drove to a tying touchdown which was good enough to send the Buffs to Miami and a 27-21 win over Clemson on New Year's Day.

Chuck Weiss, 1959 vs. Oklahoma

A mighty effort by fullback Chuck Weiss preserved CU's 7-0 victory over Oklahoma, the first victory over the Sooners since the Buffs joined the Big Seven Conference. Colorado held a precarious one-touchdown lead late in the third quarter when OU quarterback Bennett Watts broke into the open from the Sooner 14. He headed for the end zone at full speed with Weiss, a power fullback not noted for his speed, in pursuit from his linebacker post on the far side of the field. Using his angle perfectly, Weiss caught Watts at the CU 17. The Buff defense held at the four and CU had a landmark triumph.

Hale Irwin, 1965 vs. Oklahoma

It was Eddie Crowder's third season at the helm and his CU team was on the way back from the depths of three straight 2-8 campaigns. A win over his alma mater's perennial Big Eight champions would be a big step forward for the Buffs. They led 10-0 nearing the half but the Sooners were rallying, driving to a first and goal with less than a minute left. The Oklahoma quarterback spotted the hole in the line and directed a play there. But CU safety Hale Irwin, better known for his golfing prowess, alertly jumped into the breach and helped jam up the play. The Sooners failed to score and CU went on to give Crowder a homecoming victory, 13-0.

Phil Irwin, 1969 vs. Oklahoma State

En route to a furious finish which saw CU annihilate Alabama in the Liberty Bowl, the Buffs needed a clutch last-second theft by linebacker Phil Irwin to preserve a 17-14 triumph over OSU in a game which CU had to win to keep its bowl hopes alive. After the Buffs seemingly had won the game with a touchdown with 1:22 left to play, the Cowboys launched an aerial attack which moved them to the CU five in less than a minute. There were 30 seconds remaining, and a Cowboy receiver was open in the end zone. The ball was headed for him when Irwin came from nowhere to intercept it. When he downed the ball there was time for one play and the Buffs had taken a big step to Memphis.

John Stearns, 1971 Bluebonnet Bowl vs. Houston

Your team is up by six, 23-17, with seven minutes remaining in the bowl game and it's fourth-and-9 from your own 10-yard line. Punt, right? Don't tell that to John "Bad Dude" Stearns. Moments earlier, Stearns had knocked the ball out of tight end Riley Odoms' hands on fourth down in the end zone to prevent Houston from taking the lead in its home stadium. So perhaps still fired up, Stearns, who doubled as CU's punter, scooped up a bad center snap, looked around, and took off downfield for the first down. He needed nine yards, and the 12 he earned were the impetus the Buffs needed to take the ball in for the clinching score. The win gave CU its best record ever at the time, 10-2, and secured the nation's No. 3 ranking (behind Big Eight rivals Nebraska and Oklahoma).

Steve Vogel & Derek Singleton, 1981 vs. Oklahoma State

Colorado is out of time outs, is faced with second-and-14 at its own 4, there's one minute left in the game, and Oklahoma State holds a 10-3 lead in Boulder. Quarterback Steve Vogel and tailback Derek Singleton would play key roles in one of the greatest comeback drives in CU history. Vogel hits Singleton on a 10-yard pass to get CU into and fourth-and-4 at its 14, and on fourth down, the two hooked up again on a 17-yard play for a first down. From there, it took CU just five plays to get into the end zone to pull to within 10-9. Vogel then found Singleton in the end zone for the two-point conversion and CU won, 11-10. There was sadness to this story, as it would be the last game ever for Singleton. He was struck with spinal meningitis the next Friday and was hospitalized in Ames, Iowa. He passed away on New Year's night in California.

Colorado (1:28)

- 1-10 C 8 Penalty: Illegal Procedure on Colorado
- 1-14 C 4 Vogel passes incomplete, intended for Davis
- 2-14 C 4 Vogel passes complete to Singleton for 10 yards
- 3- 4 C14 Vogel passes incomplete, intended for Parker
- 4- 4 C14 Vogel passes complete to Singleton for 14 yards
- 1-10 C31 (0:47) Vogel passes incomplete out of bounds to stop clock
- 2-10 C31 (0:31) Vogel passes complete to Ward for 27 yards
- 1-10 O42 (0:26) Vogel passes complete to Ward for 12 yards
- 1-10 O30 (0:18) Vogel passes complete to Hestera for 21 yards
- 1-10 O 9 (0:11) Vogel passes complete to Parker for 9 yards and TD

Vogel passes complete to Singleton for two-point conversion.

Mickey Pruitt, 1985 vs. Oregon

It's year No. 4 of the Bill McCartney Era, and the second game of the season against Oregon in Boulder, while early, is important. A win would double CU's win total of the previous season and could provide momentum for CU's first winning team in six years. Oregon, trailing Colorado, 21-17, drives from its own 13 to the CU 3 and is faced with a fourth-and-goal with nine seconds left. The Buffs called for relentless pressure on Duck quarterback Chris Miller, the game obviously on the line. Miller was flushed out of the pocket, and before he could get the ball off, was sacked for a loss by sophomore safety Mickey Pruitt. The Buffs went on to finish the regular season with a 7-4 mark and earn their first bowl invitation since 1976.

Barry Helton, 1985 vs. Oklahoma State

On his way to an All-America season, punter Barry Helton might have become the first and only ambidextrous punter in Colorado, if not NCAA, history. Late in the first quarter and buried deep in their own territory, Helton came in to punt CU out of a hole at its own 18 in a scoreless tie with No. 12 Oklahoma State. A heavy Cowboy rush forced Helton, a "rightie," to his left. Instead of trying to punt the ball with his natural foot or take a loss and give OSU prime field position, to the surprise of all, he got the punt off with his left foot. It was a low line drive, but it carried and rolled for a combined 51 yards. OSU failed to move the ball and CU eventually took a 3-0 lead midway in the second quarter, but the 'Pokes rallied for a 14-11 victory. Though CU didn't win this game, Helton's "feat" won't soon be forgotten as a special record was created in the CU record books: "Longest Punt (with non-kicking foot)."

Dan McMillen, 1985 vs. Kansas

On his way to setting the Colorado school record for most quarterback sacks in a game, Dan McMillen could have lost his head. Actually, it was just his helmet. As he chased down Kansas quarterback Mike Norseth for his fifth and record-setting sack, McMillen's helmet was knocked free. But that didn't stop the Buff senior outside linebacker from running down Norseth and making the tackle. CU won the game, 14-3, and went on to post its first winning season in seven years.



Darian Hagan, 1989 vs. Texas

The season opener against Texas in Boulder was filled with anticipation, as the Buffs were nationally ranked in the preseason for the first time in 12 years, and ESPN was in town to televise the game to the entire nation. On the second play of the game, quarterback Darian Hagan set all the butterflies free as he scampered 75 yards around the left side to the Texas 2, setting up CU's first touchdown as well as the tone for the game and CU's 11-0 regular season. The Buffs went on to build a 14-0 first quarter lead and a 27-6 win.

Deon Figures, 1990 vs. Washington

Colorado, at 2-1-1 on the season and riding high after an emotional 29-22 comeback win at Texas, leads No. 12 Washington, 20-14 in the final moments. The Huskies are faced with a fourth-and-goal at the CU 7 with 1:04 left, and quarterback Mark Brunell throws a lob pass in the direction of Mario Bailey in the end zone. However, CU sophomore Deon Figures is in the way, making the game-saving interception to preserve CU's victory. Later in the same season, Figures also made an interception at the end of CU's 10-9 win over Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl, a play which prevented Notre Dame from getting into field goal range. Figures picked off the Rick Mirer pass and ran out the clock, helping CU cinch the national championship.

David Gibbs, 1990 vs. Nebraska

This game on a cold and rainy day in Lincoln had both Big Eight title and national championship implications riding on the outcome. Colorado had just taken a 13-12 lead over Nebraska, rallying from a 12-0 deficit, but the Huskers were trying to mount a comeback. Faced with a fourth-and-3 on their own 28 and seven minutes remaining, Nebraska called for a fake punt, the snap going to the upback, Tim Johnk. But the play was sniffed out by David Gibbs, who stopped Johnk for only a two-yard gain, giving possession back to the Buffs. CU scored in just five plays to take a 20-12 lead, and went on to win, 27-12, its first win in Lincoln since 1967. CU jumped from No. 9 to No. 4 in the polls, eventually going on to win the national championship.

Ron Bradford, 1991 Orange Bowl vs. Notre Dame

Bradford, a sophomore who eventually would go on to play in the National Football League, saw action in 1990 mostly in nickel situations and on special teams. However, on this New Year's night, Bradford made one of the biggest plays in CU history. Midway through the second quarter, after Notre Dame scored a touchdown to take a 6-3 lead over the Buffs, Bradford charged through the line and blocked Craig Hentrich's extra point try. Colorado rallied to win the game, 10-9, with that one-point margin, courtesy of Bradford, giving CU's its first national championship in football.

Jeff Brunner & Greg Thomas, 1991 vs. Nebraska

On a frosty night in Boulder before an ESPN national television audience, two plays stand out from a game that ended in a 19-19 tie, which would lead to Colorado and Nebraska sharing the 1991 Big Eight Conference championship. The first one is best remembered because it seemed to take five minutes for Greg Biekert to return a blocked extra point 85 yards for a defensive two-point conversion; however, the play was made possible because of Jeff Brunner's block. Then later, on the game's final play and after three CU timeouts, Greg Thomas skied high to block a Byron Bennett 41-yard field goal try to preserve the tie and CU's share of the title.



Mickey Pruitt's last-second sack against Oregon in 1985.

Chad Brown & Paul Rose, 1991 Orange Bowl vs. Notre Dame

CU took a 10-9 lead, the eventual final score, in the third quarter on an 8-play, 40-yard drive; but that game-winning drive was set up by a huge Notre Dame turnover. With 8:33 left in the quarter, the Irish had a 1st-and-10 at its own 35; Ricky Watters went over the left side for a 5-yard gain where he was met by Chad Brown, whose crushing tackle jarred the ball loose, with Paul Rose recovering at the ND 40. It was one of three straight turnovers CU forced to open the second half.

Blake Anderson, 1994 vs. Michigan

Anderson, the son of CU great and college football Hall-of-Fame member Dick Anderson, made his mark at CU primarily on special teams. In fact, he was so committed to special teams play that he earned an invitation to the Hula Bowl based on that commitment. But on Sept. 24 in Ann Arbor, and Colorado trailing Michigan 26-21 with only six seconds to go, Anderson played a huge role in what would become college football's play of the decade. As time expired, Kordell Stewart threw the ball over 70 yards downfield in the direction of a quartet of CU receivers: Anderson, Michael Westbrook, Rae Carruth and James Kidd. The play, "Rocket Jet," called for Anderson to be in position for a deflection, with the other three a few yards back to make the catch. The play, so improbable it rarely worked in practice, worked to perfection. Anderson tipped the ball to Westbrook, who landed in the end zone with 0:00 on the clock to give CU a 27-26 win.

Kory Mossoni, 2001 vs. Texas A&M

The scoring line simply reads "Johnson 52 fumble return" at the tail end of the boxscore in CU's 31-21 win over the Aggies. But a closer look at the score that came with 58 seconds left in the game shows that A&M had moved from its own 9 to the CU35 in just over a minute and was already in position to possibly tie the game. Aggie quarterback Mark Farris dropped back to pass, but was rocked by a charging Kory Mossoni, with the ball literally bouncing right into Johnson's hands to set up the easy return for six. The win was the second in as many weeks over a ranked team and helped propel the Buffs to the conference championship.

Aaron Killion, 2001 vs. Texas

Under interceptions for this game, the line does read: Killion 1-73; but the implications of this one entry were huge. In the first quarter of the Big 12 Championship game, CU was dealing with a raucous Texas crowd in Irving and a 7-0 deficit. The Longhorns drove 85 yards in six plays to open the scoring, and had the ball in position for another score at the Buff 22. But Aaron Killion snared a Chris Simms pass in the flat and took it back 73 yards to the UT12. Chris Brown scored three plays later to tie the score, the first points in a 29-3 run that put the Buffs in control of the game and on their way to their first Big 12 title.

Jordon Dizon & J.J. Billingsley, 2004 vs. Colorado State

Ahead 27-24, CSU had a first-and-goal at the CU 1-yard line with 30 seconds remaining, but had no timeouts remaining. Surprisingly, former Buff Marcus Houston tried to win the game for his new team but was shellacked for no gain by freshman linebacker Jordon Dizon. Even more surprising was that CSU went for the win without spiking the ball to stop the clock, as a pitch to Tristan Walker was sniffed out by safety J.J. Billingsley, who stopped him at the CU 3 with corner Lorenzo Sims coming over to help finish the tackle and preserve the win for the Buffs.

Chase McBride, 2007 vs. Colorado State & Oklahoma

The diminutive 5-6 return man played a key role in two come-from-behind wins that opened and closed September 2007. In the season opener, with CU down 28-25 to the rival Rams, he returned a punt 43 yards to the Ram 34-yard line with 2:08 remaining, setting up a tying field goal by Kevin Eberhart that forced overtime (the Buffs won in OT on another Eberhart kick). Against OU, he returned a punt 31 yards to midfield with 2:51 to play, which set the stage for Eberhart's 45-yard winning field goal as time ran out that gave CU a 27-24 win over the No. 3 Sooners.

B.J. Beatty & Jon Major, 2010 vs. Georgia

Just as Georgia appeared ready to spoil CU's 20th anniversary celebration of its 1990 national championship with a last-minute win, Colorado linebackers B.J. Beatty and Jon Major stepped forward and changed the script. After UGA drove to the CU 27, Beatty's strip of quarterback Aaron Murray and Major's recovery with 1:55 remaining allowed the Buffaloes to exit Folsom Field with a 29-27 victory and head into their final Big 12 Conference season with a 3-1 record.



Ahkello Witherspoon, 2016 vs. Oregon

Colorado opened conference play at Oregon, having lost six straight games against the Ducks including all five since joining the Pac-12 Conference. The Buffaloes zoomed to a 23-7 lead early in the second quarter but saw Oregon rally to take a 38-33 lead heading into the fourth quarter. Steven Montez and Bryce Bobo hooked up on a 31-yard touch-down pass and the ensuing two-point conversion to thrust CU back into the lead, 41-38, with 8:43 remaining. But all that appeared headed for naught as the Ducks drove to the CU 7 and had a first-and-goal with under a minute to play. UO quarterback Dakota Prukop attempted to hit Darren Carrington on a fade in the end zone, but Ahkello Witherspoon jumped the route and picked off the pass with 48 seconds left to preserve CU's victory.



Ahkello Witherspoon's interception with 48 seconds remaining preserved CU's 41-38 at Oregon.