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While the state's two biggest college football brands look like half-teams speeding toward the cliff, three other Colorado programs deserve your attention.

CU has a QB crisis with no solution in sight. CSU has a Swiss-cheese D that got its coordinator canned mid-game. But elsewhere, Air Force looks like it might be Colorado's lone bowl contender this fall, while Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference frontrunners CSU Pueblo and Western Colorado are playing undefeated ball with rosters chock-full of locals.

Air Force's postseason potential

Let's start with the Zoomies, who are 3-1 and on track to snap an uncharacteristic two-year bowl drought. Troy Calhoun is in his 20th season as the Falcons' head coach, but insists it "feels like Year 1."

Air Force boasted Colorado college football's most exciting player this season — junior QB Liam Szarka, a former Grandview star — but the Szarka Show came to an abrupt end in the Falcons' win over Navy last week. Szarka suffered a lower-leg injury and is out for the season. Hurt headliner be damned, Calhoun's crew still has a chance with its patented triple-option.



Air Force quarterback Liam Szarka, center, looks to pass during the first half of an NCAA college football game against the Navy, in Air Force Academy, Colo., Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026. (AP Photo/Tyler Tate)

Will it result in a 14th bowl berth under Calhoun? At this point, the Falcons seem to have better postseason odds than the Buffs or Rams. In Calhoun's tenure, Air Force has won eight bowl games, compared with two for CSU and zero for CU.

And what is for sure — as those crazed football fans who stayed up past midnight on Sept. 26 to watch Air Force's marathon double-OT win over Nevada saw — is that the Falcons can be competitive in every game.

"I've got a feeling we've got more than a couple one-score games as we go forward," Calhoun told The Denver Post. "… Now it's a matter of coming up with one more stop or being able to score on one more drive, because that might mean a couple of more wins."

Sophomore QB Evan Medders is the Falcons' new QB in the wake of Szarka's injury, while a handful of seniors will continue to be impactful for the Falcons in running back Rocco Conti, tight end Simon Kibbee (Grandview), and the linebacker duo of Blake Fletcher and Dallas Daley.

Remember, this is an old-school program operating in a wild-west, NIL, transfer-portal landscape. Air Force cadets cannot get NIL. The Falcons do not have transfers. They don't even have redshirts. Run-heavy Air Force is winning the traditional way — program development and coach longevity.

Plus, the Falcons offer the best value, on average, to see FBS Division I football in the state. And as Calhoun argues, perhaps the best environment. Air Force has four home games left in 2026.

"(Falcon Stadium) makes the hairs stand up on your arms, and your pulse beats differently anytime you come to a football game at the United States Air Force Academy because of the young men and women who are there — their toughness, their heart, their unselfishness, their willingness to fight for our freedoms," Calhoun said. "… Oh by way, we play some pretty good football, too, and there's a good number of years where that's been the case."

CSU Pueblo's 29-game RMAC win streak



Wide receiver Marcellus Honeycutt Jr. (10) of the CSU Pueblo ThunderWolves hauls in a touchdown pass against the Colorado School of Mines Orediggers on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2025, at Alumni Field at Marv Kay Stadium in Golden, Colo. The following extra point would tie the game that CSU Pueblo would go on to win 41-34. (Photo by Timothy Hurst/The Denver Post)

The college football-as-it-used-to-be theme is familiar to CSU Pueblo and Western Colorado in the RMAC, Division II programs that do get some transfers, but largely operate with very little or no NIL. CSU Pueblo won the conference's lone football national championship in 2014 and is the two-time defending RMAC champion.

The ThunderWolves (6-0) haven't lost a conference game since Sept. 23, 2023, a Division II-best 29-game win streak, but have their sights set deep into December after losing in the first round of the Division II playoffs each of the last two seasons.

"Losing the way that we did last year in the playoffs, and really the last two years, has really ignited a fire in some of these guys," CSU Pueblo head coach Philip Vigil said. "This team has really taken ownership in that. Yes, there are some things that we've used in the past that are external motivators, but the reality is for us to maximize our potential, it has to be deeper than that. It has to be deeper than what happened last year. It has to be our desire and willingness to be the best we possibly can be every day."

Beyond sophomore QB Navi Bruzon, CSU Pueblo is headlined by an array of Colorado players.

That list includes sophomore running back Russell Patton (Far Northeast), junior wideout Marcellus Honeycutt, Jr. (George Washington), sophomore linebacker Carter Daniels (Mountain Vista), senior safety Kahden Rullo (Grandview), sophomore left guard Odin Johnston (Lakewood), junior defensive end A.J. Jordan (Vista Ridge) and senior kicker Jackson Smith (Arapahoe).

Daniels, whom Vigil says was overlooked coming out of high school because of his size, wears the green dot as the defense's communicator and is the team's leading tackler. Rullo, a captain, wears No. 3, a number with special significance to CSU Pueblo, since it was the college number of former ThunderWolves defensive coordinator Donnell Leomiti, who died in 2020 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

"Leomiti was getting chemo treatments at halftime, then calling the second half of the game," Vigil said. "Our weight room here is named after him. It's the Donnell Leomiti Warrior Center, and so that number within our program means a lot. It means a lot to our guys, and for Kahden to wear that number exemplifies what kind of person and player he is. He's a warrior, a leader, and plays with heart and determination."

Just like last year, the ThunderWolves are on a collision course with Western Colorado for the RMAC title.

In 2025, CSU Pueblo won the top-10 showdown against the Mountaineers by rallying from a two-TD deficit at halftime and then using Smith's 32-yard walk-off field goal to claim a 24-21 win. This year, the two programs meet in the regular season finale on Nov. 14 at the ThunderBowl. Both Vigil and Western Colorado head coach Jas Bains insist they're not looking too far ahead to that matchup.

Western Colorado seeking next step



Western Colorado wideout Caden Measner carries the ball upfield during the Mountaineers' 45-28 win over West Texas A&M on Aug. 28, 2025, at the Mountaineer Bowl at the Rady Family Sports Complex in Gunnison, Colorado. (Courtesy of Western Colorado Athletics)

The Mountaineers — who have transformed from an RMAC cellar-dweller into a heavyweight since Bains took over in 2011 — are looking to build on the program's recent milestones. Western Colorado posted a program-record 11 wins in 2024 that culminated in its first NCAA playoff victory, then won 10 games last year and had another playoff victory before losing in the second round in OT to UT Permian Basin.

But Bains says that this year's team, which features a slew of returning talent, has to mold its own identity.

"The past is the past, even as you've got to honor the history of where you're at and the teams and tradition that have come before us," Bains said. "But we've asked this 2026 group to leave its own mark, and we're focused on that."

Bains, who signed a new three-year contract in January, believes it's a good sign that Western Colorado is 6-0 despite "not playing four good quarters of football across the board yet." Case in point: the Mountaineers fell behind 17-0 to New Mexico Highlands last Saturday, then ripped off 52 unanswered points in a blowout win.

Fifth-year QB Josiah Roy (Pine Creek) is in his first season as Western Colorado's starter after serving for several years as a backup. Other local talent includes sophomore running back Isaiah Jones (Mesa Ridge), fifth-year wideout Caden Measner (University), fifth-year wideout DJ Allen Jr (Widefield), senior linebacker Ian Loomis (Loveland), and senior defensive linemen Mikey Smith (Doherty) and Drew Johnson (Salida).

Bains made the case for Colorado college football fans frustrated with the struggles in Boulder and Fort Collins to jump aboard the RMAC wagon.

"It's a premier conference in Division II football — we've had a lot of teams in the playoffs over the years, we've had teams make deep runs, we've recently had Colorado School of Mines play in the national title game in consecutive years," Bains said. "Plus, there are a lot of Colorado kids that play on a lot of our teams.

"… I think fans should definitely take notice of that and either drive down to their local stadiums if they're nearby, or catch us online on the live stream."