



# Bufs go from big foes to big friends

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, August 12, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The two massive young men comprising the right side of the Colorado offensive line have come a long way to reach a point where they can depend on each other.

Just a couple years ago Ryan Miller and Bryce Givens wanted to tear each other apart.

They made the most of their one opportunity on the football field in the 2006 Class 5A state championship game when Miller's Columbine team defeated Givens and Mullen.

"We were head up for most of the game," Givens said. "I was choking him. He was giving me clubs to the head. Yeah, we didn't like each other at all. It was a straight-up brawl the whole game."

Word is they went a few rounds off the field, as well.

"We would end up in the same places in high school and it was just nasty," Miller said. "It's ironic that we play right next to each other right now, and we've grown into such good buddies. But it was ugly."

Looking back on it now, Miller said his final high school game might have been the turning point in their feud. He said things changed about 3 minutes into the third quarter of that game and they have steadily improved since.

"We beat the crap out of each other," Miller said. "For most of the entire game, Bryce had had his big 'ol mit around my entire neck and I couldn't do a thing. When the third quarter rolls around, he tries to go for that throat and I just bring a club out of nowhere and get him right in the head and just drop him."

"I think, maybe, it might even be that moment where we kind of settled our differences."

Givens respectfully disagrees.

He believes it actually came a year later when he decided to join the Colorado program after backing out of his commitment to Nebraska when the Huskers changed coaching staffs.

"Even coming into college I was like, 'Oh man, I've got to play with Ryan Miller. That dude,'" Givens said. "But we've grown as friends, and we're buddies now and that relationship will carry on the next three or four years. You just had to cut your ego and be like, 'I'm not a high school player any more. We play on the same team and it's all about the team.'"

They spent last season with lockers right next to each other. They have been to each other's houses, gone to movies and out to dinner together. All of those activities were once unthinkable.

The duo have just about everyone who cares about CU football excited for the 2009 season and the future of an offense that has languished at or near the bottom of the Big 12 the past three years.

CU plans to power the ball down the field on the ground this fall and mix in some play-action passing. Miller and Givens seem like guys who can make that work.

Miller stands 6-foot-8 and weighs in at 320 pounds. He is a gargantuan guard. Givens is 6-6 and 280 pounds with a wide wing span perfect for picking off pass rushers trying to go wide.

"We really hope that tandem develops into what we envision it to be," offensive line coach Denver Johnson said. "We certainly look at that and have high hopes that it continues to develop."

Miller said his move back to guard where he played at times in 2007, is going well. He said he is beginning to feel more comfortable there and that allows him to play with more aggression. Part of his newfound confidence can be traced to the development of his former rival in spring ball and now in fall camp.

"There is a huge confidence playing right next to him," Miller said. "I know he's going to be there. I know he's going to make the right choices and do the job."

Givens has come a long way this offseason.

His redshirt year last fall was prematurely cut short by several concussions that led to health problems he admits were a scare. He lost weight and was worried for a time in November that football might be taken away from him.

He said he can't worry about getting hurt again now that he's worked his way back. He has to play with the no-fear demeanor that made him a four-star recruit in 2008.

"I mean, I'm kind of concussion prone," he said. "When I was a child I had some problems with migraines. I don't feel like that plays into it though. I feel like I'm so geeked out and going and then all of a sudden a big hard hit to your head. That does some trauma and some damage."

"It's kind of inevitable it's going to happen. Even in the NFL. I know some pro players and they're kind of messed up after football. Hopefully that doesn't happen to me, but I'm willing to play the sport."

Givens said Miller has been a big help to him since he joined the program. He's in the right tackle position Miller used to man. Givens said he doesn't expect to have an All-American type season as a redshirt freshman this fall. He knows he will make mistakes, but he also is confident enough to feel sure he will have plenty of good moments, too.

## **Holding pattern**

Wide receiver Andre Simmons spent another day on the sidelines Tuesday waiting for paperwork from his junior college in Kansas to arrive, verifying he passed summer classes, received an Associates degree, has 48 transferable credits and has completed 40 percent of the work toward a degree. All are requirements for him to be eligible at CU this season.

CU officials previously outlined a plan of specific classes for Simmons to take in the spring and summer, and as long as he received a C-minus or better in each of those classes, he will eventually be

cleared to play. CU does not accept Ds.

CU officials previously said they had received verbal confirmation from Independence Community College that Simmons has successfully completed all his classes with passing grades. Once the paperwork arrives and Simmons is cleared, he must go through three practice sessions with limited equipment and contact like the rest of his teammates already have done.

## Notable

The Buffs donned full pads for the first time Tuesday and enjoyed several periods of tackling during practice. Hawkins said Thursday's scrimmage will include situational work as always and the first and second teams will likely be limited to 40-50 snaps. The scrimmage will be on Folsom Field and is the final practice open to the public this year. ...

Offensive lineman Matt Bahr sat out Tuesday's practice with a sprained ankle. The injury is not serious and Bahr is expected to return soon. Injured players have not been made to move wheelbarrows of sand to this point in camp, but Hawkins said the sand and tools are available and could be broken out soon. The tactic has been used in past years to encourage players with mild injuries to fight through them. ...

The Buffs practice twice today from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 4 to 5:30 p.m.



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sports

special-teams duty in 2007.

## CU football: Devenny plays numbers game

By Irv Moss  
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — At least Patrick Devenny can concentrate on playing tight end in his senior season and not worry about finding a No. 17 jersey hanging in his locker.

"Hopefully I can contribute and make a big season out of it," Devenny said Tuesday after coach Dan Hawkins put his Colorado Buffaloes through their first practice in pads.

"Right now, I'm expected to be a leader. Position-wise, it's blocking and receiving. I feel comfortable with the offense and what they're expecting all of the tight ends to do."

Devenny paused for a moment to think back to his early days at CU, when his playing assignments weren't so focused. He began at quarterback as a redshirting freshman in 2005 but moved to tight end and then to backup quarterback in 2006 and back to tight end and

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"Three years ago, I started the season working at tight end, and the next thing I know, we were at Kansas, and they put a No. 17 jersey on me," said Devenny, who now wears No. 33. "We were really thin at quarterback, and I stayed as the emergency quarterback the rest of the season."

He doesn't look at his duty at quarterback as wasted time.

"It helped me learn the offense really well because I had to take all the quarterback tests," Devenny said. "Those things are brutal . . . it helped me in the long run."

Settling on tight end began to pay off in 2007. Devenny made his lone play on offense productive with a 3-yard touchdown catch against Miami of Ohio. Last year, he had 14 catches for 116 yards and two touchdowns.

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But he also found that tight end wasn't a no man's land. Fellow senior Riar Geer has been firmly entrenched at tight end for three seasons and probably will get most of the action in 2009. Seniors Devin Shanahan and Luke Walters are in the mix, and sophomore Ryan Deehan played in every game last year, turning five catches into 61 yards and a touchdown.

"The nice thing about this offense is they throw us in when we're needed," Devenny said. "I definitely think Riar is going to be in any down and distance. We can all catch and run. I've worked on my blocking this off season so I can get into the mix."

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waiting for simas, simmons

## CU counting on young wideouts

By Jim Armstrong  
The Denver Post

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Scotty McKnight, the only returning wide receiver who caught a pass for the Buffs last season, practices Monday. CU is looking for its first-year players to step up and make some big plays. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post )

BOULDER — Two years later, Markques Simas is right back where he started. He had potential then, the first day he walked onto the CU campus, and he has it now.

Great thing, potential. Unless, of course, you don't fulfill it. Then it's more curse than compliment.

"I'm tired of hearing that word 'potential,' " Simas said. "I want to get out there and prove myself. I know what I'm capable of doing. I definitely have confidence in my ability to help us to our goal, which is 10 wins."

He might want to start by getting on the field. Simas, a highly touted wide receiver from San Diego, redshirted in 2007 and was declared academically ineligible last year. Then came last week's two-game suspension for violating team rules.

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That makes Simas a redshirt sophomore in search of his first catch at CU. For the record, there's a lot of that going around at CU. In the aftermath of Josh Smith's transfer to UCLA, the Buffs have one wide receiver — Scotty McKnight — who caught a pass in 2008.

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If you're wondering how important Simas and junior college transfer Andre Simmons are to the Buffs' big picture, look no further than that stat. But if you insist on another one, try this on for size: CU averaged 5.76 yards per passing attempt last season. The 1989 team that won 11 games averaged 10.9, the 1990 national championship team 9.4.

"They don't respect our passing game because it's not really a threat," Simas said. "I hope I bring an outside presence to help Scotty inside. And hopefully Simmons can do something outside, so they're going to have to respect us. I'm looking to raise that number (5.76), definitely."

The good news for CU is this: While they don't have many wide receivers who've made big plays at the college level, at least they have some big players at the position. Simas is 6-foot-2, 215 pounds; Simmons 6-3, 210. Two other wideouts stand 6-foot or taller — redshirt freshman Dustin Ebner and junior Cameron Ham, each 6-1.

In the end, of course, all that will matter is the size of their contributions. For now, all that receivers coach Dan Hawkins — yes, that Dan Hawkins — has to work with is potential.

"We're just trying to look at a lot of young guys in there who have a chance," Hawkins said. "We'll see how they fit in and how they emerge. I think there are some players out there."

Said Simmons, who came to CU via South Carolina and Independence (Mo.) Community College: "I'm just trying to make some big plays

and put us in position to move the football. The Big 12 is pretty much a passing league. If you can't throw it, you really can't win in this league."

Another stat to ponder: CU's offense accounted for 35 plays of 20-plus yards in Hawkins' first season as head coach. That number spiked to 58 — 18 via the run, 40 through the air — in 2007, creating huge expectations for last season. So what happened? The offense crashed and burned, putting up 40 plays of 20-plus — eight on the ground, 32 passing.

Eight running plays of 20-plus yards? That was a good Saturday or two for Rashaan Salaam when he won the Heisman Trophy in 1994. Therein lies one of the CU passing game's biggest problems circa '08 — with no running threat, it made it virtually impossible to have a passing threat.

"You've got to be able to run the football so people know that's a legitimate threat," Hawkins said. "Then you have the chance to be able to launch the football. It's hard when you don't get protection, and it's hard when you don't have that running game that makes people say: 'Well, you'd better think about getting an eighth guy down there to defense the run. Otherwise it's going to be a struggle.' "

There are strong indications that CU's offensive line could take a major step forward. For one thing, 6-8, 320-pound right guard Ryan Miller is healthy after a broken leg cost him most of last season. For another, left tackle Nate Solder, all 6-9, 305 of him, has a year of experience on the line after converting from tight end in the spring

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of 2008.

"These guys are big dudes," quarterback Tyler Hansen said. "It feels good standing behind those guys. It feels like you've got all day to throw. You can pick and choose who you want to throw to."

The rest is up to the receivers. McKnight figures to do his share after catching 46 balls for five touchdowns, but he needs help. It may not come quickly, what with Simas' suspension and Simmons having just been cleared by the NCAA to play, but the potential — there's that word again — appears to be there.

"Some guys are going to have to step up and play," McKnight said. "We've got some bigger guys out there now. We're going to have to force-feed Andre when he starts practicing. We need him. And we need Markques to be focused. I think last year, with him having to sit out, it kind of remotivated him. When he finally gets out there, he's going to tear it up."

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## Colorado defensive line starts to rebuild

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
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BOULDER — Maybe Romeo Bandison would be a tad more stressed about replacing three starters on Colorado's defensive line if he hadn't done it before.

At least, that's the impression he gives.

He was in similar straits four years ago when he began his first season coaching the Buffs' defensive line. Back then, George Hypolite, Walter Boye-Doe and Maurice Lucas hadn't played much. And Brandon Nicolas hadn't played at all. Abraham Wright was the lone returning starter. Despite a 2-10 mark, the line held up well.

Hypolite, Nicolas and Lucas rarely left a game in 2008. Or in 2007 and 2006. They combined for 88 of a possible 111 starts over that span. Last year, they were in on 1,981 snaps, or 79 percent of all defensive plays. So their departures upon entering 2009 mean Bandison must find replacements amid a bunch of Buffs who've spent a lot of games watching the action.

Again.

Shrug.

"To me, it's no different than when we first got here; to me, it's no different than what most teams are doing," Bandison said. "You got three-year starters, and at some point, you have to have new guys that'll step in there.

"I welcome the challenge. Some people think it's a big story. I'm going, 'This is what we do.'"

Bandison's tranquility isn't necessarily shared by fans, who hear other coaches talk up the depth at linebacker and cornerback. Head coach Dan Hawkins said defensive line replacements will come "by committee," noting those players who've been "waiting in the wings" need to grow up.

Defensive tackle Taj Kaynor is a fifth-year senior who's been waiting in the wings. Kaynor's efforts to gain weight continue. He has his cell phone programmed to remind him to eat. He said he's at 280 pounds, but that after one practice, he dropped to 274. He's not devouring 8,000 calories a day anymore — yet he makes sure "food is always around."

Weight is not as important as consistency, Bandison said. Bandison said Kaynor's passion and confidence jumped in the spring due to improved work habits. That might have been a problem while Kaynor sat behind Hypolite and Nicolas.

"George and Brandon were good," Bandison said. "If you get into your head that you're never going to beat those guys out anyway, it makes it hard to work as hard as you can everyday."

CU lists Kaynor behind 6-foot-1, 280-pound sophomore Curtis Cunningham at defensive tackle. Bandison said CU will always have a nose tackle and a defensive tackle in the game, regardless of whether it's using three or four defensive

linemen. When CU inserts four linebackers, it'll maintain a four-man front, Bandison said.

Marquez Herrod, a fourth-year junior, is listed at 6-2, 275, and as the starter at left defensive end. He has appeared in 258 plays over the past two seasons. Third-year sophomores Conrad Obi and Lagrone Shields (both 6-3, 275) are listed as the top two ends on the right side.

Third-year sophomore nose tackle Eugene Goree (6-1, 305) was in for 89 snaps last fall.

Freshman Nick Kasa will be hard to keep out of the lineup if he continues to perform as he has in early practices. Kasa was a sprinter in high school who clocked times of 11.1 in the 100 meters and 23.7 in the 200. He practiced with the track team his senior season at Legacy High in Thornton but did not compete in meets because they would've been too time-consuming, he said.

Kasa focused on his workouts instead, and then he spent the summer in Boulder. He has gained 20 pounds. He said he weighed 267 entering one recent practice, and the exact same after it.

Of Kasa, Bandison said that "right now, I want to see that guy make plays, learn the defense and become a good technician — those things I look for."

Said Kasa: "I don't expect to play right away. I have to earn my spot like anybody else would."

Forrest West and tackle Nate Bonsu are the other new freshmen. Bandison said that during his tenure in Boulder, he's never had three freshmen so ready to play upon entering the program.

The numbers are there; they just have to play. Bandison said he believes the line will be fine.

"I'm not trying to say I'm the best coach in America, but I think I know what it takes and I know what the defense is capable of," he said. "Our defense is not set up where our defensive line has to carry the team. Everybody has their job, and I think if everybody can do their job, we'll be fine."

EXTRA POINTS: Receiver Andre Simmons remained out of practice Tuesday. CU reported late Tuesday afternoon that it had not received the paperwork it needs from Simmons' former school, Independence Community College, to allow Simmons to begin practicing. Hawkins has said he expects things to be fine once the paperwork arrives. When asked about Simmons' chances of playing in the Sept. 6 opener against Colorado State, Hawkins said, "We'll just see how long it takes him to adjust." ... Thursday's scrimmage, scheduled for Folsom Field, will have about 40-50 snaps for the first and second teams, Hawkins said. The scrimmage will be the final practice during camp that will be open to fans. ... Today's practices are scheduled for 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 4 to 5:30 p.m. ... The team was scheduled to go to Elitch Gardens for its team unity function on Tuesday.

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## Three wishes for the 2009 Colorado football season.

August 11, 11:39 PM · Chris Jackson - Colorado Buffaloes Examiner

I have been thinking about this for a while now, and I have come up with three things I would like to see from the Buffs this year to consider this a successful season. Here they are:

**Consistent quarterback play** – Two years ago, [Cody Hawkins](#) burst on the scene. He looked like the kind of quarterback [Dan Hawkins](#) needed during his first year at Colorado.

Last year, however, the younger Hawkins did not improve, more like he regressed. Midway through the season, the elder Hawkins started giving freshman [Tyler Hansen](#) playing time. Both QBs had their moments, but never were able to consistently put up good numbers from week to week.

If CU is going to do anything on the gridiron this year, they are going to need one of these quarterbacks to take hold of the job in the fall practice, then go on the field every Saturday, and own it.

**A winning season** – Dan Hawkins has never had a winning season in his years at Colorado, he hasn't even finished at .500. The last time CU finished with a winning record was Gary Barnett's last year as the head coach. Hawkins has taken the team to a bowl game, [a 30-24 loss to Alabama, in the 2007 Independence Bowl](#), that dropped CU's record to 6-7. This year, they need have more marks in the W column than in the L column.

The schedule is favorable. The Buffs should be halfway there by the time they play at West Virginia October 1st. After that it is just a matter of pulling out three wins in conference, which is possible, since the Big-12 North is full of question marks, and Texas A&M is scheduled to come to Boulder November 7th.

And, finally . . .

**A bowl win** – You have to go all the way back to the [2004 Houston Bowl](#) to find the Buffs last post-season win. Five years is a long time in the college football world.

Realistically, I think CU could be 6-6, maybe even 7-5, after their showdown with Nebraska. That kind of record would put them in a mid-tier bowl game, against a mid-tier team. Under these circumstances, I don't think it is unreasonable to expect this year's version of the Colorado football team to end the season hoisting a bowl championship trophy.



Courtesy: Associated Press

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