



More chances coming for CU's Espinoza

Hawkins praises receiver's reliability

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, August 22, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The very limited track record Jason Espinoza has as a punt return man in the Colorado football program doesn't exactly scream for further opportunities.

He received two chances to return punts in two games last season and finished with a net total of minus-1 yard.

But that is a very long way from telling the full story on the third-year sophomore walk-on from Alamosa.

Espinoza surely would have had more returns on his résumé last season if not for breaking his collarbone twice during the season and undergoing surgery to have a plate and screws installed to keep it from happening again. He might have taken the job away from Josh Smith if not for his injury because coaches love his dependability and toughness.

"I'm confident," Espinoza said of returning to action this season. "I just don't put too much pressure on myself. I just need to go in there and pick up where I left off."

The season is two weeks away and Espinoza is the favorite to replace Smith as the Buffs' punt returner. Smith decided to leave the program last spring and it remains unclear where he will continue his college football career.

Espinoza also figures to get plenty of opportunities to make his mark as a wide receiver, in part, because of Smith's departure but also because of youth at the position and a disciplinary issue that will prevent Markques Simas from playing in the first two games.

Espinoza, who is known throughout the program as "Espy," earned his opportunities to fill in for Smith last season because he rarely drops a ball in practice. He has continued to build his reputation as Mr. Reliable during fall camp this month.

He is the kind of try-hard guy coach Dan Hawkins has always loved to have in his program. Now that Hawkins is coaching wide receivers and has Espinoza in his group and meeting room every day, he loves him even more.

"He's just such a detail guy," Hawkins said. "He almost never, ever makes a mistake. He's such a precise route runner and a detail guy, and he can read coverages and make plays when you get the ball to him."

Espinoza is only 5-foot-8 and 190 pounds. He doesn't have overwhelming speed in the way former Buff wideout and return man Jeremy Bloom possessed. He succeeds through work ethic and determination. He said he doesn't pay attention to those who doubt him.

"That doesn't even bother me because all summer I'm out here working, catching balls every day, running routes against our corners," Espinoza said. "I know what I can do. Our quarterback and everyone else knows what I can do. So

that doesn't even bother me at all."

Another key to Espinoza's success is his willingness, make that eagerness, to be coached. He credits special teams coach Kent Riddle and running backs coach Darian Hagan, who work with the return men, for teaching him how to do the job right.

"In high school, everything is athletic ability," he said. "When you get here, it's all technique. I just listen to coach Riddle and coach Hagan."

Espinoza's says he doesn't want to be just a guy who catches five-yard passes or fields punts with fair catches. He wants to bring fans out of their seats, provide some excitement and score touchdowns.

In the long run, he also hopes to earn a scholarship.

"If I ever do earn a scholarship, I'm not going to change at all," he said. "I'm going to have that good work ethic that I've learned. That's why I've been here for two years."



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Players impressed with Polk, too

Written by [kyle](#) in Friday, August 21st 2009 under [Uncategorized](#)
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One of the success stories of fall camp at CU has been the play of Ray Polk after a year in which he decided to change positions from tailback to safety and underwent surgeries on each of his shoulders because they were chronically separating.

Coaches have raved about Polk's play at strong safety, where sophomore Patrick Mahnke figures to start, but players like it, too.

"He's coming along awesome right now," free safety Anthony Perkins said. "Just from where he started to where he is now has been incredible. If he can continue to keep gaining like he is right now, I think he will be w real good player. He will be a force."

Perkins said the entire secondary is playing at a high level and is two-deep at every position.

"We've got more depth I think overall as a team than we've had since I've been up here, especially at defensive backs," Perkins said. "We've just got a lot of athletes who are coming along and everyone is in their playbooks. Everyone is knowing what they are supposed to be doing."

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cu football briefs

Hawkins awaits update on Kasa's knee injury

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BOULDER — Colorado freshman defensive end Nick Kasa might avoid surgery on a partially torn medial collateral ligament.

"Don't know. We'll kind of see how this whole thing responds. We'd like not to do it," Buffs coach Dan Hawkins said Friday. "I think they (the medical staff) feel it's progressing nicely."

Kasa, the top in-state freshman recruit who was injured Monday, has been the biggest casualty of CU camp.

As soon as Kasa heals some, Hawkins hopes to see what progress is made in rehabilitation. When Kasa advances to the training room stage of rehabbing his knee, the former Legacy High School star can look to a teammate for support.

CU redshirt freshman linebacker Jon Major, who came to CU a year ago as 2008's top-rated in-state prospect, blew out an ACL last year and required surgery. He's

counting the minutes until his delayed debut.

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"I'm sure if I see him in the training room I'm going to make sure he's doing OK and if there's anything I can do to help," Major said. "Experience helps."

Major doesn't get as many questions as last spring about the knee.

"Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's OK. I wouldn't say I'm 100 percent but I'm definitely getting there," he said.

Hawkins likes his progress.

"He's doing a nice job, and ... he's very smart," the Buffs coach said. "He gets in the right place. He'll hit you a ton."

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Defensive coordinator Ron Collins cautions that Major is not there yet and couldn't solidify the defense's starting lineup after Thursday's scrimmage.

"We hope to have a set starting lineup by the end of next week. We have a pretty good idea what our two-deep is," he said.

Footnote.

Hawkins didn't indicate any progress on getting junior college transfer receiver Andre Simmons eligible for camp.

Natalie Meisler, The Denver Post

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CU's Bonsu leans on upperclassmen

By Patrick Ridgell

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BOULDER — Big Nate Bonsu is all smiles these days.

The true freshman defensive tackle from Allen, Texas, maintained long before arriving in Colorado that the chance to play right now was appealing, and very possible. It's looking like it'll happen.

At 6-foot-2 and between 297 and 300 pounds, Bonsu has the size CU coaches want at defensive tackle. What he says has been difficult is learning everything he must know, especially the playbook.

He arrived in Boulder on May 30, and except for a four-day trip home around July 4, he's been in Boulder the whole time, trying to soak up everything. Bonsu credits his older teammates with making his transition easier.

"They don't make you feel like you're a little freshman," he said. "Of course, you have to learn the ropes and earn your spot, but they never make you feel like you're a little freshman.

"From Day 1, I think the whole D-line and other people in the defense, we know we're in the same boat. I guess since (preseason predictions) were trying to say we're going to have a weakness at D-line, everybody took that as the weakest position affects the whole defense. So everybody is in there with each other to help each other out."

MORE D-LINE: Forrest West, a 6-1, 245-pound defensive end, is another true freshman coaches say might play in 2009.

West was lightly recruited out of Canton, Conn., after he ruptured his right pectoral muscle lifting weights prior to his junior season. He said he had several offers from Division I-AA programs, but only one from a I-A school. He signed with CU in February and arrived on campus in late spring.

West said defensive line coach Romeo Bandison told him that if he could learn the plays, he'd have a chance to see the field right away. He said he has learned it "pretty fast" and believes he's ahead.

The knee injury that defensive end Nick Kasa suffered Monday did not instill more urgency in West. He's entering his freshman season eager to show everyone who overlooked him that they were wrong.

"I wanted to prove I could play at this level, and there was a lot of people that doubted me," West said. "So I was always trying to learn the plays."

KICKER HEALING: Jameson Davis wanted to give Aric Goodman some competition for CU's kicking jobs this month. It's not happening.

Davis' left knee, on which he had micro fracture surgery last January, remains less than 100 percent, he said. Doctors told him to expect a six- to seven-month recovery period after the surgery. He said he had an injection this week to provide better lubrication inside, where loose cartilage is floating.

"It's kind of hard," Davis said about trying to compete right now. "Aric's kicking really well. It's always nice to have someone to fill in

for you when you're not kicking 100 percent. But he's kicking good.

"It's tough for me to kick as hard as I can. So I'm just trying to get the ball down there and make a nice transition."

Davis said he hopes to be 100 percent by the Sept. 6 opener against Colorado State.

EXTRA POINTS: Head coach Dan Hawkins said he'd prefer to avoid surgery on Kasa's left knee, in which he partially tore his MCL Monday. Hawkins said the staff thinks it's progressing well, boosting hopes that surgery will be avoided. ... The coach said there was no update on Andre Simmons. ... Hawkins said linebacker Jon Major, recovering from a torn ACL, is having a good camp. "He's very smart, he gets in the right place and he'll hit you a ton," Hawkins said. Major is playing outside linebacker. Because CU has so many defensive backs on special teams, Hawkins said Major may not have a big role there.

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