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Oh, snap! Drescher has been one Buffs count on

Senior snapper has eye on NFL

By Justin Williams

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BOULDER — Sometime during Justin Drescher's later years of high school, he came to the saddening realization that his football career would likely end there.

There's just not much of a market for 230-pound offensive lineman in the college ranks. But Drescher found a secret passageway into Division I football: Become a long snapper.

"I wasn't big enough, strong enough or good enough to play the offensive line anywhere, so I lost some weight and found my niche," he said.

Drescher was recruited specifically to be the long and short snapper for the University of Colorado, and for the past three years, he hasn't disappointed. Drescher has snapped the ball for every punt, field goal and extra-point attempt for the Buffaloes since his true freshman year in 2006. That comes to 355 snaps in all, and, heading into his senior year, he looks to join Chris O'Donnell (1988-91) and Greg Pace (2002-05) as the only players to handle every snap for four straight years.

"He's been just about as consistent as a snapper can be," CU special teams coach Kent Riddle said. "You couldn't really ask for more."

Drescher lives by the same credo that any snapper lives by: No news is good news.

"I don't get much glory, but I like it that way. I like to keep it quiet and just do my job," he said. "I don't want my name in the paper unless I'm making a tackle or recovering a fumble. I want to keep it simple."

In fact, Drescher can recall only one bad snap in his three years, and that came last year against Missouri.

"I had one low to (punter Tom) Suazo," he said. "That's the only one I can remember. I've had one bad snap in three years, and hopefully nothing changes there. I don't want to jinx myself."

Buffs fans have seen Drescher's name in print on a couple of occasions — one was following the last-second fiasco against Iowa State in 2007, when the Buffs were looking to tie the game in the final seconds with a field goal. Referees called a delay of game on Drescher for snapping the ball too early, and then, they said, he didn't get the snap off in time on his second attempt, ending the game.

Then there was his fumble recovery in the 2007 upset win over Oklahoma, ranked No. 3 in the country at the time. While some probably define Drescher's career with those plays in mind, he doesn't see it that way. He likes to think of his game-winning field goal snaps as his main highlights.

"People forget that someone has to snap that ball, and there's a lot of pressure to do it," he said. "That's a great feeling."

Drescher said he has plans of pursuing an NFL career, something he never dreamed of as a high school football player. Riddle said



Colorado's Justin Drescher practices Wednesday at CU. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

Drescher has what it takes to make it at the next level.

“If you can get back there in under a certain time and hit a target every single time, they’ve got a spot for you (in the NFL),” Riddle said. “I think he’s earned a shot, at least.

“Snapping’s a skill, and he’s done a good job with that skill. He’s worked hard at it and taken pride in it.”

Drescher offered this piece of advice for any young football player looking for a chance to play with the big boys, as unlikely as it may seem: “Ton of repetitions. Get with someone who knows how to do it, and do it the right way. It takes time to finally get it down.

“You should be able to do it in your sleep. I could come out here and do it with my eyes closed, and that’s what makes you consistent with every snap.”

EXTRA POINTS: CU head coach Dan Hawkins said this year’s camp has had a better tempo than it has in the past: “Not only the first guys know how to do it, but the second guys know how to do it and, in many cases, the third guys know how to do it.” ... Hawkins said the team has not set a timetable on making a quarterback decision. ... When asked if he is still holding out hope for receiver Andre Simmons to join the team this fall, Hawkins said: “Yep.” ... When asked if or when receiver Kendrick Celestine would join the team, Hawkins replied: “Don’t know that.” ... Saturday marked the end of two-a-days for the Buffs’ fall camp. They are not scheduled to practice today.

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Buff running back 'B-Lock' zipping through openings

CU sophomore gaining more reps at running back

By Ryan Thorburn
Sunday, August 23, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Opposing defensive coordinators already know, or have at least heard a lot about, Demetrius Sumler, Darrell Scott and Rodney Stewart.

It's not a secret that Colorado has experience, potential and explosiveness at running back.

But the most versatile member of the backfield -- sophomore Brian Lockridge -- might be flying under the radar a little bit.

Probably not for long though as the coaching staff prepares him for the season at tailback, both wide receiver positions and on special teams as a kick returner.

As a true freshman in 2007, "B-Lock" averaged a Buff-best 5.6 yards per carry. He redshirted last season to heal from a sports hernia.

Recently, due to minor injuries sustained by Scott and Stewart, Lockridge has been the beneficiary of extra snaps in practices and during the team's second scrimmage.

"After being out of the picture, it has helped to get more reps. I'm learning a lot more and getting more opportunities to learn," Lockridge said. "Last year I learned patience. Football is not always guaranteed, and you have to be here for the moment. I enjoy each day because it might not last long."

The 5-foot-7, 180-pound Lockridge says he is as fast as Stewart, CU's leading rusher last season who goes by the nickname "Speedy."

"Brian is a guy who brings a ton of energy and someone who we definitely want the ball in his hands," quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "He's one of the most explosive players on our team, and no one is ever going to deny that. ...

"Brian's a guy who can be scary if he gets the ball because he has that breakaway speed that you really want in a football player."

Lockridge also has the attitude the head coach is looking for as the Buffs look to turn the corner in Dan Hawkins' fourth season at CU.

"He's so optimistic and so positive. He just never slows down, and I think it rubs off on everyone else because he plays fast all the time," Dan Hawkins said. "He'll run 80 yards all the way down here (in practice) and he'll turn around and be back in the huddle before anyone else."

First-year offensive coordinator Eric Kiseau plans to pound defenses early and often with Sumler and Scott running behind a mammoth offensive line. That should allow the diminutive Stewart and Lockridge some opportunities to make some big plays late in games.

"That's why I keep telling them to play fast," running backs coach Darian Hagan said. "Because defensive guys are not going to be able to find them back there behind that offensive line."

Starting middle linebacker Jeff Smart says that even if you are playing sound assignment defense it can be difficult to find Stewart and Lockridge before it's too late.

"There are many times (in practice) when you can definitely lose those guys behind the line," Smart said. "And they're so quick that they can pop out of spots and then be gone. That's an issue defenses will have to deal with."



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sports - cu football briefs

Defensive coach hails freshman's progress

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Colorado freshman defensive end Forrest West is turning heads, leading some to wonder if coaches in the Big East and Atlantic Coast Conference will someday regret not having shown more interest in the Connecticut native.

"I hope so," Colorado defensive coordinator Ron Collins said Saturday after a 90-minute morning practice. "He really fits the mold of the kind of player that we want. He's a good person. He's smart. He's a hard worker."

And on the field?

"He can run, and he's strong," Collins said.

West, 6-feet-1, 245 pounds, grew up a fan of Boston College, the alma mater of his parents. But Boston College and dozens of other schools backed off of their recruitment of West after he tore

his right pectoral muscle and right biceps tendon during a weight-training accident before his junior year at Salisbury (Conn.) School. Colorado

Colorado Football

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stayed on West and invited him to the Buffaloes' 2008 summer camp, before his senior season.

After a week in Boulder, West decided it was best to head west. He became the first Connecticut native to join the CU football program out of high school since defensive end Denis Cimmino in 1971.

"Most of my friends are real happy I'm out here," West said. "When I came out here for the camp, I just loved everything about it."

West said he is still adjusting to the quicker pace of college ball. But he's doing quite well. Coach Dan Hawkins said West reminds him of

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Abraham Wright (2004-06), the Buffs' last great pass rusher from off the edge.

"Forrest has a lot of speed, a lot of explosion," Hawkins said. "And he's a smart guy, so when you get into some adjustments he's able to handle it."

End of two-a-days.

Some coaches considered Saturday, the final day of two-a-day practice sessions, to be the end of preseason "camp" because game preparation for the Sept. 6 opener against Colorado State begins Tuesday, when players return from two days off. Classes begin Monday.

Asked how this team compares with his previous three at this stage, Hawkins said: "It's not even close. We have way better tempo. Not only do the first-team guys know how to do it, the second guys and in many cases the third guys know how to do it."

Orms impresses.

Defensive secondary coach Greg Brown said it's too early to make decisions about whether to redshirt true freshmen, adding that safety Parker Orms has done a nice job.

"He's smart, he's tough, he knows what to do with the ball when he gets his hands on it," Brown said of Orms, a former all-everything, do-everything Wheat Ridge standout. "He's a baller. He's what we thought he would be."

Footnotes.

Hawkins said he was not surprised the Big 12 tied the Southeastern Conference for most teams (five) in The Associated Press preseason top-25 poll. . . . Hawkins said wide receiver Andre Simmons has not been cleared academically, but coaches remain hopeful he will join the team. . . . Former Colorado quarterback Joel Klatt, an analyst for Fox Sports Net, will work in the booth for the CU vs. CSU game, along with Dave Lapham and Joel Meyers. "It's a great break for me," Klatt said. . . . Still no timetable for naming the starting quarterback, Hawkins said.

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sports - college football

State's QBs wait for a signal

Coaches at CU, CSU and AFA are struggling to commit to a No. 1 starter under center.

By Benjamin Hochman
The Denver Post

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CU quarterback Cody Hawkins started 23 games the past two seasons. Some college coaches are in the midst of waiting out QB candidates to see who separates himself from the competition. (Karl Gehring, Denver Post file photo)

Adams State's football team has something that the squads at Colorado, Colorado State and Air

Force don't.

A defined No. 1 under center.

While quarterback Steven Baca will start again for Adams State, those other state teams have yet to name a starting signal-caller, and across Colorado, everyone from quarterbacks and coaches to boosters and bloggers are eager to anoint.

But as CSU coach Steve Fairchild said last week, after a practice littered with incompletions and interceptions, "The earlier you name a guy the starter, the better it is, but if you name a guy before he merits that promotion, you're doing everybody an injustice."

So when does a player need to know he's the quarterback? There is no formula or equation or cosmos that proclaim, universally, the exact day a coach should pick a passer. Heck, Fairchild said it's possible that he could wait until opening night — Sept. 6 at CU — to start Grant Stucker, a returning senior, or Jon Eastman, a junior-college transfer. That said, it's more realistic Fairchild will name a starter during game week or if a guy "strings together two to three consistent practices."

Such is the case in Boulder, where Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen, two buddies, are battling to crush the other's dream. Both have had their moments during camp, and in a Thursday scrimmage, neither helped the coaching staff's decision when they didn't commit a turnover. And at the academy, Air Force's Tim Jefferson is listed

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ahead of Asher Clark and Connor Dietz, but there has yet to be an official announcement, while the trio shares snaps during practice.

"When one guy plays, he plays the majority of the time," Falcons coach Troy Calhoun said of naming a starter. "There are so many nuances that come into play — calling cadence, the way he communicates formation and the timing that's required between quarterback and receivers — it's going to function more optimally when one quarterback gets most of the work.

"I think what you do every single day is you try to develop a full football team, and a key part of that is having depth at every single position. Different situations arise and you expose guys and help guys to make sure they have quality repetitions, regardless of their first team or second team."

That is precisely the spin coaches put on quarterback controversies, and understandably — competition, in the very definition of the word, should bring out the best in competitors. Occasionally, a coach might know who he wants to start, but he'll keep the players guessing, so no one's head gets too big for his helmet.

"It probably would be easier knowing that you got the spot," CSU's Stucker said, "but I don't think any one of us would be getting any better in camp, because when you know that your job is on the line, you're going to work a little bit harder to secure it. There's good and bad both ways."

When coaches don't have a defined starter, they often find themselves in the precarious role of ego managing. You want both guys to remain confident, but you also want one guy to separate himself from the other. Quarterback, perhaps more than any position in any sport, is defined by mental toughness.

Hansen said the waiting game gets "a little frustrating," and it's hard to believe the other quarterbacks across the state don't feel the same way. Stucker talked about the weight of the hefty playbook on his mind, knowing that he has to know this thing like he wrote it himself — or else he'll be holding it on the sidelines come Saturdays.

For many of the coaches in charge of grooming these players through this grueling process, one benefit is they have been in their cleats.

"I was in a quarterback battle all the time, because I wasn't very talented," Fairchild, a former CSU signal-caller, said with a wry smile. "Every time I played, they were trying to find somebody to beat me out."

Bufs offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau was always in quarterback battles, and he uses his past experiences to mentor Hawkins and Hansen, knowing one of them — perhaps both — will benefit from his experience, as much as his expertise.

The best-case scenario, after all, is to have two quarterbacks so prepared to start that it's a win-win. But then can you win on Saturdays with a

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guy who shared snaps and is only recently the anointed team leader? That will have to be the case with many of Colorado's top college teams.

The question remains: Can you ever be too late in naming a starter? Can the quarterback battles backfire?

"I don't think you can be too late," Kiesau said. "It's just got to be the right timing. The players even know it too — at the end of camp, if you asked player A and player B who should be quarterback, they'd both say the same player.

"You just got to make the right decision when the decision seems right."

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COLORADO

Cody Hawkins, junior: He has started 23 games at quarterback the last two seasons.

Tyler Hansen, sophomore: He didn't play the first six games last season, but then took off his redshirt.

COLORADO STATE

Grant Stucker, senior: The Parker native played in four games last season.

Jon Eastman, junior: Played junior college last season at Snow (Ephraim, Utah) College, leading his team to the NJCAA championship game.

AIR FORCE

Tim Jefferson, sophomore: Had a 5-3 record as a starter last year and was the MWC freshman of the year.

Asher Clark, sophomore: Primarily played tailback last season and was second on the team in rushing.

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