

Bufs boost WR corps

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Suddenly, Colorado is enjoying an infusion of size, speed and swagger at wide receiver.

Andre Simmons -- the highly touted transfer from Independence Community College -- adds the size and speed. The 6-foot-3, 210-pound junior practiced with the Buffs for the first time on Wednesday night after finally getting through the red tape with his transfer to CU.

"Any football player doesn't want to stand on the sideline," said Simmons, who reported with the rest of the Buffs on Aug. 6, but was not allowed to work out with the team until his eligibility was approved. "I stayed positive the whole time."

Anthony Wright, who has officially switched from cornerback to receiver, provides the swagger. If nothing else, the confident 6-0, 195-pound redshirt sophomore talks a great game.

"That's up to the coaches. Whatever they think is the right decision for the team," Wright said when asked if the position change was permanent. "Who knows, I might be playing offense and defense. That would be cool. Charles Woodson did and he won a Heisman."

The head coach/wide receivers coach is just looking for some help for Scotty McKnight. Dan Hawkins expects CU to have a strong running game this season and will probably lean on it until Simmons gets on the same page with the quarterbacks and Markques Simas returns from a two-game suspension.

"I think he has a little bit of a grasp about what's going on," said Hawkins, who believes Simmons can contribute in the opener against Colorado State on Sept. 6. "He's a very quiet kid but he's a soaker. He soaks up a lot of stuff."

Simmons was one of the last players to leave the field on Wednesday after doing some extra conditioning work. Wright also stuck around and caught extra balls after the session.

"Every day they keep throwing more at me," Wright said. "The terminology, it's like a different language. It's like Spanish."

Simmons was the No. 35 overall junior college prospect (the third-ranked receiver) in this year's recruiting class, according to rivals.com. He can also help the Buffs in the punt and kickoff return game, another area that could use some help with Josh Smith transferring to UCLA over the summer.

"It's just a matter of time and studying my playbook and getting the timing down," Simmons said.

Wright redshirted as a true freshman in 2007 and did not see any game action last season on the defensive side of the ball. He also missed spring drills with a knee injury. During his high school days in Compton, Calif., he played running back and receiver, racking up 1,168 yards and eight touchdowns rushing and 394 yards and five touchdowns receiving as a senior.

Hawkins said defensive backs coach Greg Brown -- who has plenty of talent to work with at cornerback this season -- was the one who recommended giving Wright a shot on the other side of the ball.

"I kind of asked them playing around to see what they would say," Wright said. "I was joking around and saying, 'You should try me at receiver.' ..."

"I'm an athlete and wherever you put me my athleticism can take over. I know I'm fast and I can catch."

Notable

Tyler Hansen missed Wednesday's practice due to illness. ...

Rodney Stewart is getting back in a groove this week after nursing a hamstring injury earlier in camp. ...

According to CU, freshman defensive end Nick Kasa's injured knee is still too swollen to determine whether or not he will need surgery. The diagnosis is officially a sprained MCL.

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CU's Smart embraces another role

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/26/2009 11:38:40 PM MDT

There are a lot of good stories on any football team.

Brian Cabral's favorite from the 2009 Buffs is probably Jeff Smart's.

"I think it's awesome," Colorado's legendary linebackers coach said. "For a walk-on to become a captain ... that says volumes about him."

Smart was an outstanding player at Boulder High School but didn't possess any of the "measurables" major college coaches look for on the recruiting trail. It didn't help that the Panthers finished 1-9 during his senior season.

Gary Barnett invited Smart to CU's camp in August of 2005 anyway.

Scholarship not included.

"Coming in here, I was just happy to be on the team," Smart said. "Then as a redshirt freshman I was just happy to be playing special teams and actually getting on the field. The progress I've made since then has definitely exceeded my expectations. It's really cool to look back and think about where I came from and where I am now."

Smart was named one of the Buffs tri-captains earlier this week, along with fellow senior linebacker Marcus Burton and senior tight end Riar Geer.

Two years ago, due to an extreme lack of depth at linebacker, Smart was given an opportunity to start at inside linebacker after mastering outside linebacker in practice. He finished with 80 tackles playing next to Big 12 defensive player of the year Jordon Dizon.

Cabral was as surprised to see Smart's progression as the running backs he was planting into the Folsom Field sod.

"I just thought he was a walk-on. His first couple years he really didn't distinguish himself," Cabral said. "I think how he started to distinguish himself was when I would move him around to different positions and he had to learn different positions. One week he was a 'Mike,' next week he was a 'Will.'"

"I'd switch him back and forth. When the opportunity came for him to play, I had full confidence that he knew what he was doing and that's how he got his opportunity, just being able to handle a lot of things."

Smart started all 12 games (three at outside linebacker and nine on the inside) last season, earning Big 12 second-team honors with a team-high 198 tackles.

"He's not the biggest, he's not the fastest, he doesn't look like a Big 12 linebacker," said Cabral, who has coached names like Matt Russell, Greg Biekert, Chad Brown, Ted Johnson Hannibal Navies and Dizon during his two decades as a CU assistant. "But he certainly is. He's always in the right place at the right time. Always."

Smart's style has always been to lead by example. Players like Dizon and George Hypolite have been the vocal leaders of the defense in recent seasons.

The new captain understands his role as a team spokesman and mentor must expand this fall.

"I also have to step up and be more vocal. There are certain times where I need to do that," Smart said. "And I definitely pull guys aside -- guys who are struggling, guys who are doing well, young guys, older guys -- and talk to them. I've been here for a long time, so I think I have a good understanding of what it takes to be successful here. I'm always looking for guys to pull aside and give advice to."

Smart is one of three walk-ons from the 2005 fall camp, along with linebacker Brian Stengler and tight end Devin Shanahan, to make it as fifth-year seniors. All three are now on scholarship.

Only eight scholarship players from the 2005 recruiting class are still on the roster.

"The few of us that have stuck around here and battled through all of the adversity and all of the ups and downs, I think there would be nothing better than to just go out and really set the stage for the success of the years that follow us at CU with a big year," Smart said. "Being a captain on this team is an unbelievable honor. The fact that your teammates vote for that ... it feels great."

Even though the final chapter has yet to be written, Cabral said being around an overachiever like Smart has been just as rewarding as coaching an All-American.

"I think it's even more gratifying to see someone to take full advantage of everything the way Jeff has," Cabral said.

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cu football

Simmons has Buffs' opener in his sights

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/27/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — Still a bit out of breath after his first practice, Colorado wide receiver Andre Simmons said Wednesday he expects to play in the Buffaloes' Sept. 6 opener against Colorado State despite not having much time to get ready.

"The coaches knew that I could do that or they wouldn't have recruited me; they've got a lot of confidence in me," said Simmons, a 6-foot-3, 210-pound junior who had been held in limbo and off the field since preseason drills began because of a snag in his transfer from Independence (Kan.) Community College.

Simmons said the delay involved gathering paperwork from additional summer classes that he took in order to enroll at Colorado. Simmons drew four stars from Internet recruiting sites and was rated among CU's top 2009 signees. Wide receiver is a position of need for the Buffaloes.

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"I had to get used to the quarterbacks, get my timing down, some route running," said Simmons, who is called "Dre" by the team. "It was a pretty good day for a first practice. It's easier to learn when you're out there, instead of staying on the sideline watching. I catch on pretty fast."

CU coach Dan Hawkins called Simmons "a soaker" when asked about the newcomer's ability to learn quickly. Hawkins said Simmons can help in the season opener.

"He soaks up a lot of stuff," Hawkins said.

Wright stuff.

The biggest difference between playing

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THE DENVER POST

cornerback and wide receiver? Sophomore Anthony Wright pointed to the bulging spiral binder tucked under his arm.

Wright said he was "kind of like joking, but being serious" when asking Hawkins on Saturday if he could get a tryout at wideout.

"Man, (wide receivers) have a big playbook," Wright said Wednesday. "It's a whole different language. I walk around with it all day. I don't look at it during class, though."

Wright (6-0, 195) just wants an opportunity to play. Although this is his third season, he has no game experience. Wright redshirted as a freshman in 2007 and did not get off the bench last season. He was stymied on the depth chart behind a bevy of experienced cornerbacks.

Wright said he didn't know if the position change would be permanent.

"I just want to be on the field anywhere," he said. "I'll play special teams, offense, defense, anywhere. I'll play wherever I can."

Footnotes.

Sophomore tailback Rodney "Speedy" Stewart is back practicing in pads after missing a dozen days. He strained a hamstring during the first scrimmage, on Aug. 13. "It will probably be awhile, but he's getting there," Hawkins said of Stewart. . . . Sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen did not practice Wednesday because he felt ill, the coach said.

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Longmont, Colorado
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2009

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Buffaloes welcome two receivers to offense

By Patrick Ridgell
© 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — All of a sudden, the Colorado Buffaloes have some depth at wide receiver.

Maybe.

On Wednesday, Andre Simmons finally received the clearance he needed to practice with his new team. He was on the fields, huffing and puffing through his first workout as a Buff in the afternoon. And third-year sophomore Anthony Wright, a cornerback in the program up until this week, has moved to receiver.

So what does it mean? Will Simmons and Wright bring play-making and athleticism to CU's receivers? Possibly, but indications are it won't happen right away.

Head coach Dan Hawkins said "huge" when asked how far behind Simmons is, and added he's a "long ways away" from being in a position to play. Hawkins blurted out a laugh when asked about Simmons' conditioning.

Wright doesn't sound much better off in some ways. Tucked securely under his left arm prior to meetings Wednesday was the playbook. Chances are he goes nowhere without it these days.

"It's like a whole nother language," Wright said. "I listen to the quarterback and I'm like, 'What did you say?'"

Simmons' final clearance, which came 19 days after camp started, was undoubtedly a welcome bit of news to the program. Coaches and teammates say Simmons can make plays, based on tapes they've seen and what they've heard. Simmons said the hold up was "just waiting for my papers to get through."

He, too, stressed the need to learn the playbook. He said he has been attending position meetings and watching some practices, which he says helped. Asked if he expects to contribute Sept. 6, when CU opens the season against Colorado State, Simmons answered with, "Hopefully."

Dan Hawkins called Simmons a "soaker," meaning he's a fast learner.

"(The coaches) have a lot of confidence in me," Simmons said.

Wright said he broached the possibility of playing receiver Saturday with Hawkins. Wright said when he did so he was "kind of like joking but being serious." Wright said later that same day, defensive backs coach Greg Brown asked him if he wanted to make the move.

Wright said he thought the move was permanent, but he believes he'll still play some defensive back. He said whether he plays Sept. 6 depends on how well he learns the playbook, but also whether coaches choose to use him.

On one thing he was clear. The third-year sophomore has never appeared in a game as a Buffalo. He wants to play.

“Offense, defense, special teams, anywhere,” Wright said.

Wright talked about how he can’t be mad about being behind corners Jimmy Smith, Ben Burney, Cha’pelle Brown and Jalil Brown on the depth chart, saying they comprise the Big 12’s best secondary. Nicknamed “The Athlete” and considered one of the team’s best, Wright played running back, receiver and safety at Compton High in California.

He was a track star in high school, once recording a long jump of 24 feet, 7 inches. He intended to run track at CU in 2008 and 2009. He said Hawkins talked him out of it in the spring of 2008, saying he should get a full year of school in first.

Wright said a right knee injury he suffered in an off-field incident last spring ended hopes then of running track. Wright said he partially tore his ACL and MCL ligaments and missed spring football to rehabilitate them. As of Wednesday, he said he intended to try indoor track next winter, and that the brace he wears will come off soon.

“We are so deep at corner right now. (Greg Brown) said, ‘Hey, you might want to give Anthony a shot over there,’” Hawkins said. “You hate stealing corners, you don’t want to do that. It was kind of coach Brown’s idea.”

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

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[Watch for these freshmen across the Big 12](#)

August 27, 2009 3:36 PM

Posted by ESPN.com's Tim Griffin

We're headed down to the final week of camp as two-deep rosters are getting set for next weekend's openers across the conference.

A collection of talented freshmen have emerged at Big 12 programs so far in training camp. Here's a look at one newcomer to remember from each Big 12 team as we head into the start of the season.

Baylor: Imposing 6-foot-6 freshman wide receiver Willie Jefferson has already played his way into the Bears' rotation at receiver. He's shown a knack for making acrobatic, leaping catches and has made a quick connection with Robert Griffin in the Bears' offense.

Colorado: Freshman defensive end Forrest West is mature enough physically to compete for playing time immediately from early in the season. Coaches rave about his quick learning abilities and his physical skill. They think he can position himself into the rotation early in the season.

Iowa State: Freshman middle linebacker A.J. Klein, who turned 18 in July, has already turned heads because of his physical play and knack for roaming from sideline to sideline for tackles. He's now No. 2 on the Cyclones' depth chart behind starter Jesse Smith and should see playing time from early in the season.

Kansas: Coach Mark Mangino has already said that freshman wide receiver Bradley McDougald performed better than any freshman he's had in his program. The converted defensive back is already earning snaps at wide receiver -- improving the Jayhawks in speed and talent at an already stacked position.

Kansas State: Freshman cornerback Thomas Ferguson has been an early producer at workouts and has a good chance to see playing time immediately because of the new 4-2-5 defensive alignment favored by coordinators Chris Cosh and Vic Koenning.

Missouri: Freshman running back Kendial Lawrence will get immediately playing time, despite the stacked roster in front of him with Derrick Washington and De'Vion Moore. Lawrence can provide a speedy element for the Tigers to be looking for after rushing for 2,679 yards and scoring 43 touchdowns last season as a high school senior.

Nebraska: Freshman I-back Rex Burkhead, who was impressive early and has kept getting better. With Quentin Castille being kicked off the team, Burkhead now is the No. 2 I-back on the roster behind starter Roy Helu Jr.

Oklahoma: Freshman cornerback DeMontre Hurst has emerged as one of the surprises at camp. Hurst had two interceptions at the Sooners' recent scrimmage and should have had another.

• **Tim Griffin**



Tim Griffin joined ESPN.c in Februar

2008. He has covered the Big 12 since its inception, among a variety of beats during a 24-year career at the San Antonio Express-News. Griffin, a Memphis State University graduate, lives in San Antonio with his wife and son.

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Oklahoma State: Freshman safety Daytawion Lowe, who has shown well at several recent practices despite playing one of the team's deepest positions. Lowe will play in the Cowboys' defensive rotation.

Texas: Freshman quarterback Garrett Gilbert has staked his claim for the backup position behind Colt McCoy, taking advantage of Sherrod Harris' slow recovery from knee surgery. Look for Gilbert to get playing time this season and position himself for a strong bid for Texas' 2010 starting job.

Texas A&M: Freshman linebacker Sean Porter played a lot with the first-team defense in the Aggies' most recent scrimmage. A&M coaches have been impressed with his speed and athletic ability and he's playing at a position of need for his team.

Texas Tech: Running back Eric Stephens has emerged in the Red Raiders' rotation behind Baron Batch and Harrison Jeffers. Coach Mike Leach has described the 5-foot-8, 185-pound Stephens as "built for combat." Look for him to be used immediately in the running game and also as a kick returner.

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Sports > Commentary

DOUGLASS: Hawkins can't help but stir the pot

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COMMENTARY

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Oops, he did it again.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins, previously known for his "It's Division I football! It's the Big 12! It ain't intramurals ..." outburst and the whole "worst day in Colorado is better than the best day Nebraska" bit has continued his trend of raising eyebrows with his offseason comments.

This year's Hawkins quote that created a stir was more on the mild side, but nevertheless gained the fourth-year Buffaloes' coach plenty of publicity. Following last year's 5-7 season, Hawkins delivered his now-famous "10 wins and no excuses" line at a team banquet last December, adding additional scrutiny for a coach who many college football analysts believe is already on the hot seat.

Hawkins has since explained that his remarks were presented more as an expectation of excellence than an actual prediction. And while people in these parts are typically going to be quick to pick apart anything that a Colorado coach might say, Hawkins makes some good points.

"To me, if you coach and you play, your goal ought to always be to win the national championship and win your conference," Hawkins said. "I think that's part of it, but I'm never going to sell our guys short and I think I'm a big believer in what your expectations and your vision and what your standard is.

"If you're not a high-standard guy, you're a low-standard guy."

Colorado senior linebacker Marcus Burton said he thinks Hawkins' "10 wins and no excuses" comment was largely misunderstood.

"I think for the media, it was just a sound bite — something to get amped up about," Burton said. "For us, it was more of, 'Are we on the same page here? Do you guys feel like we should be winning more games here like I feel?' kind of deal.

"And next season should be our season where we turn the corner."

Burton said the Buffaloes were just coming off a losing season, capped by a 40-31 loss at Nebraska in a game that turned on Alex Henery's Memorial Stadium-record 57-yard field goal.

"It was more of a deal where we had just come off that 57-yarder from Nebraska — fresh wounds — and Coach Hawk is one of those guys who always visualizes the best thing," Burton said. "He wants us to see ourselves winning."

Hawkins' words certainly had the desired effect upon his players.

"It fired us up," Colorado senior tight end Riar Greer said. "But at the same time, it felt realistic and that

gave us even more confidence.

"We went through every game on our schedule, saying if we could win or lose and we definitely feel like we can win 10 games. That's the goal and we're concentrating on that."

Despite a 13-24 record and just one bowl appearance in his three seasons in Boulder, Hawkins refuses to lose his positive attitude. He's optimistic that Colorado is about to turn the corner and will soon be enjoying success like he had from 2001-05 at Boise State when the Broncos were 53-11.

Although the Big 12 Conference preseason media poll predicted a fourth-place finish for Colorado in the North Division, some view the Buffs as a potential darkhorse. That very well could be, especially considering that from the start of fall camp last season through the spring, CU had 25 players injured badly enough to either miss significant playing time or require surgery.

"You stay healthy, you start putting things together and get a couple breaks and, wow, it happens," Hawkins said. "Every place I've been we've won championships. Every place. Part of that is it's the expectation."

While some Colorado fans may be getting impatient with Hawkins, his players seem to be keeping the faith.

"As players, we don't really pay attention to all that," Buffs' senior linebacker Keith Smart said. "We take care of our business each day — working out, running, throwing — and everything else will take care of itself."

So the program is headed in the right direction under Hawkins?

"Absolutely," Smart said. "Absolutely."

Smart said Hawkins hasn't changed much since taking over for former coach Gary Barnett prior to the 2006 season.

"He's a full-of-energy guy — full of information and knowledge (and) shares that with you, always trying to get you to read books about life and all kinds of quotes and things like that," Smart said. "He's really stayed the same."

Greer said he thinks most true Colorado fans remain on board with Hawkins.

"We have such a great fan base — people understand that it takes time when you change coaches to turn a program around," Greer said. "They see Coach Hawkins and what kind of coach he is and how awesome he is with our whole program."

"He's done so many great things for the whole city of Boulder, everybody has great confidence in him and they're expecting great things."

is sports editor for The [Independent.com](http://www.theindependent.com).

[Terry Douglass](#)

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