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john henderson

Henderson: Buffs might have gem in Simas

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

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IRVING, Texas — Leftover notes and literary darts from last week's Big 12 football media days:

- The perception around the league is receiver Josh Smith's transfer leaves Colorado void of playmakers. One scribe asked me, "Why is Colorado trying to be a running team in a passing league?"

It may not. Watch out for sophomore receiver Markques Simas. Former Buff George Hypolite recently told me Simas "will break some kind of record in the Big 12."

- Think Oklahoma-Texas is a heated rivalry? Wait until October. Texas' players may have forgotten about losing the South Division to OU on last year's tiebreaker, but I don't think Texas coach Mack Brown has. Neither has OU's Bob Stoops. "You want to throw out our win over

Tech?" he said. "Fine. Then throw out Texas' win over us."

- I could listen all day to Bill Snyder and Stoops talk about taking over Kansas State in 1989 after it had gone 3-40-1.

"We had four total D-linemen," Stoops said. "Two were nonscholarship. We had four guys for four positions. We'd be practicing team sessions, and we'd have to stop and take a five-minute break to hose them off."

- Cowboys Stadium will shoehorn more people into the Big 12 championship game, but I prefer the SEC championship at the Georgia Dome. Two groups of partying boosters rub Budweisers in downtown Atlanta. Cowboys Stadium is in Arlington, Texas. Arlington is in the middle of nowhere.

- Either Nebraska coach Bo Pelini has learned how to lie or he is way too optimistic about his quarterback situation. Behind junior Zac Lee, who has thrown two passes in college games, is redshirt freshman Kody Spano, who's back after injuring his ACL; true freshman Cody Green, also hurt in the spring; and junior Latravis Washington, a converted linebacker.

"We feel good about the quarterback position," Pelini said. Colorado fans do too, Bo.

- The weirdest player in the league might be Texas Tech guard Brandon Carter. He's 6-feet-7, 354 pounds, wears black war paint, is covered in tattoos and has the spiked hair of a London punk

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rocker. He asked coach Mike Leach where his tattoo was. "On my scalp," Leach said. "I just grew hair over it."

- Final thought: Texas A&M could be really pitiful.

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Mailbag: Broncos and Buffs evaluated

Bruce from Delaware wonders if the Broncos are moving in the right direction

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/06/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT



Denver Post sports columnist Woody Paige posts Woody's Mailbag on Thursdays.

[Drop a question into Woody's Mailbag](#) , or visit [The Denver Post's Sports Page](#) .

Woody, I am a long-time Bronco fan and am concerned about the events that have taken place since the nightmare against San Diego to finish the 2008 season. Are the Broncos moving in the right direction?

-- Bruce Jenkins, Wilmington, Del.

Bruce: Giddyup! When practice ended up the other day, Josh McDaniels walked up and said: "What do you think?" I felt like quoting Robert DeNiro out of "Taxi Driver:" "You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me?" Why would he ask me? I'm just a wordsmith. Actually, I'm just a blacksmith with a laptop. I replied: "The team looks great, and you utilize your practice time very well, and I like the watermelon for the players after the workout. May I have a slice of watermelon?"

The Broncos are moving in a new direction, but **I don't know if it's the right direction** . What I believe sincerely is if McDaniels hadn't gone through the Cutler Dilemma (which was like the "Borne Ultimatum") everybody would be excited about this training camp. After three one-on-one conversations with Josh — lasting about five hours — I know he is a brilliant young coach, and he will be a success with the Broncos ultimately. He's as sharp as Mike Shanahan was when he was an assistant here and later, as a head coach. Mike was so creative, and Josh is, too.

I thought the league caught up to Mike (who I spent time with recently in Lake Tahoe), and Mike will return as a different coach. But do the Broncos have the right mix now? The secondary is vastly improved. The defensive line is a real question mark, as far as I'm concerned. Even though the Broncos will rely on the outside linebackers to apply pressure to the quarterback, the starters at defensive end are question marks, and the depth at that position is shallow.

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Denver Broncos head coach Josh McDaniels talks with defensive coordinator Mike Nolan during practice on Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2009 at Dove Valley. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

I had written the Broncos should sign Ronnie Fields as a nose tackle, and they agreed. He will be good in the middle. I'm not certain about the outside linebackers, but I'd love to see Robert Ayers, the rookie, and Jarvis Moss starting. They're big guys who can rush. But Moss probably will be traded or released, and Ayers won't start for four or five games.

Offensively, the Broncos will have a better running game, and I'm happy that they'll continue to zone block on the line most of the time.

Brandon Marshall's injury and attitude will be a question, but Jabar Gaffney is a player, and Eddie Royal is a Pro Bowler in waiting. The offensive line, Mike said, is one of the best in the business.

But I'm worried about two dozen or more new players coming together with a new coaching

staff, and new schemes, and I'm seriously worried about that schedule. Josh and I had a polite argument about the strength of schedule, but he knows it will be tough to beat Pittsburgh, New England, Indianapolis, Baltimore, San Diego, Dallas I could go on.

Can Kyle Orton be more than an average quarterback? How quickly will running back Knowshon Moreno develop, and why was he so stupid to stay out of camp when he could have established himself as a starter? Will (bleep)

Woody Paige

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Field at Mile High ever become a dominant home-field advantage again?

(Inside Information Alert) Josh told he will use the hurry-up offense sometimes at home, but not to rip him if he doesn't do it early. Sometimes you need a change. The country needed a change, I believe. The Broncos needed a change, I believe. How will it play out? I'm impressed with what I've seen in training camp, but I haven't seen the Broncos win in Cincinnati yet. So, forgive me for reserving judgment. But, if you're a fan, hang in there. It will only get better.

Hi Woody: Do you think Michael Vick would be a good fit in Denver ?

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-- Daniel Dey, Jr.

Daniel Dey Jr: Were you the star of "There Will Be Blood?" I guess not. Will there be Vick? No. Not a chance. The Broncos don't want another problem. They have Chris Simms under contract for two years, and they have a rookie you will need to keep an eye on in the future (Tom Brandstater out of Fresno State). The Broncos will not run the Wildcat Offense, and McDaniels told me he won't be changing quarterbacks in games or during the season (unless, I suppose, Orton really goes south). I've been told that Vick still wants a lot of money. He doesn't fit with the Broncos or in Denver.

So, Dan Hawkins is thinking 10 wins this season . I don't see it. I pencil them in for maybe five, at best. What are your thoughts?

-- J.R., Boulder

J.R.: I'm somewhere between Dan and you. I need to see the quarterbacks, although Hawk may not say: "What do you think?" We usually talk about shoes or restaurants. I'm thinking seven, maybe eight at the outside, at best. They don't know who the QB will be, and I'm not sure they have a starting quarterback. Wide receiver Josh Smith leaving was a big-time loss, and they still have depth problems. I'm not wild about the wide receivers, or the defensive backfield.

Here's a clip-and-save prediction: Colorado will beat CSU; Toledo; Wyoming; lose at West Virginia and Texas; win against Kansas; lose at Kansas State (although this is a toss-up); beat Missouri,

Texas A&M and Iowa State; and lose at Oklahoma State. After that, I think the Nebraska game makes or breaks the season. Beat Nebraska and you go to a good bowl. Lose to Nebraska, and the Buffs will be in the also-ran bowls.

We all know the Cornhuskers will be better, but not much better than the Buffaloes. Plus, the game is in Boulder. No way Colorado wins 10 (hello, Texas; and Okie State still has the best quarterback out of Colorado in a while in Zac Robinson from Chatfield). But the Buffs will win more than five. They will win four or five of their first six games.

Many people have the Broncos out for the count! I have been an NFL fan for a long time, and I think the Broncos have many weapons and have a lot of potential. Do you think the Broncos are going to surprise a bunch of people this year?

-- BigTimeBroncoKeith, Miami, Fla.

BTBK: McDaniels gave me some grief for picking the Broncos to win five or six games, and I told him my real prediction will come after the third exhibition. Again, the defense concerns me. They'll probably have eight new starters, and **Mike Nolan's career as a head coach and defensive coordinator has been up and down** . Surprise? Vegas says the over-under is seven victories. I wouldn't bet either way, and I don't bet. You'd guess that they could split the games in the division (3-3) and win maybe three or four more, but McDaniels reminds he has never been part of a losing team since he began football in

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junior high. That's pretty strong. Then again, he hasn't been with the Broncos in the past few years. I think the Dolphins will have a better year.

Hey, Woody. Love you on "ATH." Do you think Lance Armstrong has another Tour de France victory in him? Thanks.

-- Jay, Denver

Jay: Love you in the Mailbag. Good question, although nobody cares but me and you. I've covered the Tour de France and love it, and I was there for a couple of Lance's victories. I believe has a real chance to win again. He'll be on a new team (Radio Shack) next year, and he'll be the Alpha Dog again. I think he proved this year he's not finished. He had a neck injury early in the year. Lance shared No. 1 rider with **eventual champion Alberto Contador and he still finished third**. Give him a full year to train harder and longer, and I give him a puncher's chance. He looks good in a yellow jersey.

Woody, what do you think the chances are that John Elway comes out of retirement to play for the Broncos this season? They clearly need someone else, and the prospect of a three-win season might strike a nerve with him.

-- Ron Young, Gulfport, Miss.

Ron: When I was young, my parents took me to Gulfport for vacation. The mosquitoes tried to kidnap me. I think you've been bitten by too many mosquitoes and have East Biloxi Disease. You have John Elway confused with Brett Favre.

Mr. Paige, Sani Becirovic was a second-round draft pick of the Nuggets in 2003. If he hadn't suffered a major injury he easily would have been a first-round pick. Sani had a really good year with Lottomatica Roma last year and has not signed a contract yet this summer. With Anthony Carter wanting a multi-year deal why haven't the Nuggets given Becirovic a guaranteed deal this summer?

-- Brent, Iowa (and a big Nuggets fan!)

Brent: Nice thought, but Sani Becirovic (who actually has a lot of squiggly marks above his name) is too old (28) to start a career in the NBA. He's not that great a shooter (except from the foul line); he's slow, and he wasn't that special with Lottomatica Roma. He's not worth a lottomoney, or the trouble. The Nuggets aren't interested, and he's better off in Rome. I'd be better off in Rome. Love that they haven't sold the naming rights to their old stadium.

Woody, how did you get picked to be on ESPN's "Around the Horn?" Did they conduct a talent search for sports writers or did you apply for the gig? Whatever the case is, it looks like a cool gig.

-- Bobo, Boston, Mass.

Bobo: If ESPN had conducted a talent search, I would have been the William Hung of the auditions. I got lucky. I think they confused me with somebody else. It is a cool gig (except for dealing with Mariotti): I get all the peanuts I can eat; I get to wear makeup; and I get e-mails from people in Boston and India.

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