

## Buffaloes` Walters granted 6th year

### Tight end unsure whether he will play next season

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The seniors on the 2009 Colorado football team stood together inside the black bubble tunnel inflated between Folsom Field and the home team locker room before every home game. It was early afternoon Nov. 27 and the Buffs were moments away from kickoff in the season finale against rival Nebraska.

It was the final game in the careers of the 18 young men standing there slapping each other's helmets and shoulder pads, shouting things like, "This is it." to one another. Some had tears in their eyes.

Reserve tight end Luke Walters was about to be introduced and run out on the field to be greeted by his teammates and his family, and he couldn't help wondering if this was actually the end of his career in black and gold or if he might get a chance to experience the moment all over again next season.

Seven weeks later, he has at least part of the answer.

The NCAA granted the Colorado tight end a sixth season of eligibility in 2010 after he lost all or part of two previous seasons (2005 and 2008) during his career because of serious leg injuries. Walters, a walk-on from Highlands Ranch, petitioned the NCAA for the medical hardship season and learned while on vacation in California this week that it had been granted.

"It is absolutely a huge opportunity," Walters said. "... It's an opportunity for someone to step up and try to fill some roles.

"I've been 100 percent confident since the moment I stepped in the CU football program that I'd be able to contribute and provide another reliable player at tight end. I can definitely catch balls. No doubt about it and hold my ground on the line. I definitely feel like there is a spot to be filled and that I can help the team out there."

Now Walters moves on to the next step, which is speaking with Colorado coaches about whether they want him back and how he might fit in on a team that appears to need all the experience at tight end, H-back and fullback it can get.

All of those positions go hand-in-hand in the CU offense and are coached by assistant coach Kent Riddle. A total of six players, including Walters, graduated from the program at those positions in December. Walters was one of four senior tight ends on last season's team along with senior fullbacks Jake Behrens and Trace Adams.

The only player from those positions returning with any experience when the team begins spring ball in mid-March will be junior tight end Ryan Deehan. Unless Walters rejoins the program.

"I feel like there wouldn't be that much of a drop-off if you had me and Deehan in there as opposed to Riar (Geer) and Pat Devenny," Walters said. "I feel like we could definitely get the job done."

Walters said he hadn't been able to speak with Riddle or head coach Dan Hawkins as of late afternoon Friday. Coaches are focused on recruiting and haven't been able to return his calls. He said he hopes coaches will consider giving him a scholarship for all or part of the year.

Walters graduated with a degree in geography, paying for three years of his education through student loans. He spent the first two years of college as a scholarship player at New Mexico before transferring to CU. He estimates he owes \$25,000 to \$30,000 in student loans already.

If Walters wants to take advantage of his sixth season, he must be enrolled in classes at CU by next week, but having already graduated, he has no reason to enroll until he knows where he stands with the coaches and the program. He says he definitely wants to take advantage of the opportunity he has been given.

"It wouldn't make too much sense to come back if I was going to be paying for school I don't need," Walters said. "So that is kind of the question I have. I'm definitely, absolutely, 110 percent all for coming back and playing."

If he is able to come back for a sixth season, Walters said he will pursue a second major in Environmental Studies. He said he believes he could complete the second major by the end of next season if he takes classes this spring and summer.

Walters said he always tried to remain positive throughout his injuries and recovery from multiple surgeries in which doctors inserted steel rods into his left tibia. It broke in the same place in 2005 and again in 2008.

He believed he was finally going to be able to show what he could do in the CU offense in 2009, but a week into camp he leaped for a pass and landed with his ribs on his arm. He suffered a collapsed lung and missed more than a week of practice. Shortly after he was released from a Boulder hospital and returned to practice, he contracted swine flu, and missed another week.

He also played on special teams at New Mexico, but had only one catch for 14 yards as a tight end in his career. Walters said having a player like Geer ahead of him on the depth chart made it hard to get on the field for more opportunities.

He hopes his time has finally come.

"I wasn't always feeling too good about whether this was going to happen or not, but at the same time, I couldn't really think of a reason why it wouldn't," Walters said. "I've obviously had medical issues that hardly anyone would have to go through. To be honest with you, I felt like when the NCAA got my information, it was a no-brainer.

"I mean, I feel like if anyone deserves a sixth year and another chance, I do. I really do. I'm really happy that they came to that decision."

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