



Junior Tyler Hansen calls the competition at quarterback 'dead even.'  
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/18/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

## Before Fall Arrives, Buffs Need Spring Clean-Up

**BOULDER** - Perfection isn't to be expected in a first spring scrimmage, but neither is sloppiness.

The Colorado Buffaloes weren't *that* sloppy Thursday in a 163-play, 2 hour-plus session at Folsom Field - but the spring clean-up that coach Dan Hawkins keeps mentioning still needs to be implemented.

Asked if he believed his team is where he thought it might be at the halfway point of spring drills, Hawkins answered, "I don't know about that. We just need to clean a lot of things up - penalties, turnovers, not dropping the ball. I think the defense has kind of had the upper hand to his point, and if you look at the scrimmage, probably did here, too."

"There were a few too many penalties (10 for 63 yards), given the amount of plays. The turnovers (two interceptions,

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**Spring Practice Central**

one lost fumble) probably weren't bad, given the amount of plays we had."



Spring Scrimmage No. 1 Statistics

Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Eric Kiesau also lamented the number of penalties, but added, "I'm glad they called every one of them."

Hawkins applauded the defense for its pressure on the quarterbacks, but wasn't enamored with the running game. Overall, though, "I like their attitude," he said.

As for continuing to improve offensively, specifically in the run game, Kiesau added, "We've just got to continue to grind and stay on them. Right now, it's as simple as it can be. We just have to continue to get better, emphasize the details and hope we see some progress. But today was definitely not what I wanted to get out of it."

Quarterback Tyler Hansen, who again is battling Cody Hawkins for the starting job, said he had an "an OK, an average, day." He called the spring competition at his position "dead even. We've got to compete . . . I can't have an OK day; I've got to have a great day."

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:** The scrimmage was structured to give the top two quarterbacks an equal number of snaps with the first and second units, and in similar field position settings.

Kiesau said the equality plan also was extended to the wide receivers: "The ones were going 10 (plays), the two eight . . . so within those 18 'reps' I was saying, 'whoever is moving the team, you're going to stay in there.' If you go three-and-out, it's not a bad thing, but let's give the other guys a chance and let them roll through."

Dan Hawkins said he would reserve grading the competitors until he studied film of the scrimmage, but he believed both QBs "did some (good) stuff. I think with those guys you could probably split them with a hair."

Cody Hawkins completed 25 of 44 passes (59.1 percent) for 194 yards and four touchdowns, while Hansen was 16-of-29 (55.2) for 136 yards and one TD. Each was intercepted once.

Hansen believed "some of the drives were stalled because of some drops and the run game kind of stalled a little bit." He said he was "disappointed in that pick . . . I tried fitting it in and I couldn't really fit it in that small of a hole; I was kind of ticked off about that."

Through the first six practices, Kiesau said his quarterbacks' completion percentage was "almost 70 percent" and the competition "was really good - the best it's ever been . . . Before (Thursday), I thought we were progressing well. But we still have two weeks - thank goodness."

**ONE FOOT, TWO JOBS?** It's a relatively short walk from CU's practice fields to Folsom Field, but Zach Grossnickle loves it. The stadium represents his comfort zone.

"I don't know what it is about this field, but I kick better here than on the practice field," he said. "I don't know why; I have no idea. I just feel comfortable kicking up here (in the stadium)."

Grossnickle felt the same way last season: "When I was in warm-ups, I just felt great. I guess when I'm practicing, I'm just trying to get it done."

Grossman, a redshirt freshman, made all four of his field goal attempts (32, 24, 38, 32) Thursday and averaged 37.2 yards on nine punts (44 long).

Using one player for both jobs is of no concern for Dan Hawkins: "You've got to go with the best guy, and if it's one guy, you do it."

He said Grossnickle is "coming around . . . he can really hit it. He did a nice job in his opportunity for field goals. He mishit a couple of punts, but he has the ability to really hang it up there. We're starting to kind of get the kind of numbers we want in our punt game . . . they've showed up a little bit.

"We're getting them in our field goal arena, but he's done a good job in the last few practices of trying to meet our numbers in the punt game."

Among the punt team's spring goals is increased hang time, and Grossnickle appears to be delivering.

"It's just basically dropping the ball a little bit later so my (punt) just flies up," he said. "I'm just trying to match my hang time with my distance, so when my punts goes 40 yards, I want to get like 4.2 seconds.

"I felt pretty good (Thursday). I had a couple that just weren't so great . . . but I hit some fives (seconds hang time), so I was happy about that."

**NOWHERE TO RUN:** After averaging just 87.9 yards a game rushing (2.78 a carry) last season - last in the Big 12 Conference - the Buffs still are searching for their legs.

The running game didn't appear to be a point of emphasis Thursday, but there has been a reason for not pounding away at the defense this spring. The running back corps is precariously thin and anxiously awaiting the arrival of at least four incoming freshmen at the position.

The two top returning tailbacks - Rodney "Speedy" Stewart and Brian Lockridge - had only four carries each Thursday.

Said Kiesau: "That's why we want to work on our passing game and protection and route running - and that's why I was disappointed with the number of drops."

Still, CU must come out of spring drills seeing improvement on the ground, and Kiesau noted the run game "is something we have to look at . . . we've got to be smart. I've made some changes to the offense to help that, and it might mean doing some other things to counter running the ball. But we'll still work on it."

Expounding on those "other things to counter running the ball," Hansen said the approach has "kind of changed. Last spring and fall we were kind of a more pounding (offense). We had the personnel for that - tight ends and fullbacks.

"But now we don't have those; we have more speed - more skill guys, more receivers. So now we're kind of playing to that and kind of using our short passing game as kind of that running game.

"We threw the ball a lot more, and I think you guys will be used to seeing a lot more of that. I think we're going to use Toney Clemons and Markques (Simas) as our outside running game and use some zone read stuff as our running game."

When reinforcements at tailback arrive this summer, Hansen believes their adjustment to the game will be evaluated, "And if they get it and see they can do it, then maybe we'll fit them in some packages and use them in certain ways."

**MAKING HIS MARK:** In his assessment of the scrimmage, Dan Hawkins noted that a number of "young guys made plays - that was good."

Atop that list was redshirt freshman Parker Orms, a budding safety who managed to make plays no matter his defensive unit - first, second or third.

A 5-foot-11, 180-pounder from Wheat Ridge, Orms mostly played the nickel position vacated by 2009 leading tackler Cha'pelle Brown.

And Orms apparently liked the role; in addition to being the afternoon's leading tackler (11 total, six unassisted), he contributed three tackles for loss, three third-down stops and one quarterback sack.

"He's a baller, he really is," Dan Hawkins said. "He's not maybe as tall as you'd want a guy to be, but again, he knows how to play football. He's not extremely fast, but he's a fast football player . . . he plays fast. Part of that is his instinct and part of it is physiological makeup.

"He's got a good head about him. He's one of those gym rat guys; he's played little league and basketball . . . he's been playing all the sports since he was very, very small - all the sports. He's just got a great awareness to him."

**FASTER, WISER:** The defense as a whole appeared to play faster, and Dan Hawkins attributed that to the unit being "a little more confident. They've been in the saddle a little bit more; they're not faced with as many new things and have some guys who've been through it a few times."

Inside linebacker Jon Major echoed his coach's belief that the defense is playing with more confidence. But he also pointed out that experience is showing up now in key places - "especially on the D-line. That kind of helps everyone; it kind of sets the tone up front and helps us play fast.

"I think we pretty well (Thursday), especially on the run. They (offense) made only a few big plays . . . one of our goals is to keep it under about 3.3 (yards) a carry, and I think we reached that."

Major, showing no adverse effects from the knee injury that sidelined him as a freshman in 2008, said his spring has gone well thus far, but added, "You can always improve. As long as I'm keeping on the incline; I don't want to plateau. But I'm feeling pretty good about being in this position, and being able to help younger people, too."

Of his pick and 41-yard return of a Hansen pass, he said, "I read the quarterback and tried to do what I was supposed to do. I had fun on that return . . . it was kind of back to the glory days."

**MCKNIGHT INJURED:** Leading receiver Scotty McKnight, who made three receptions for 31 yards - including a 14-yard TD, suffered an lower leg/ankle injury late in the scrimmage and left the field on a cart.

Trainer Miguel Rueda there was nothing peculiar from magnetic resonance imaging exam. Team doctors will examine McKnight again Friday morning and no determination has been made as to how long McKnight might be out.

**BUFF BITS:** Defensive back Travis Sandersfeld missed the scrimmage with a pulled hamstring . . . Redshirt freshman Derrick Webb saw some duty as a blocking fullback in short yardage situations. Hawkins said there is "no shortage of guys you could put back there," and mentioned Major among the possibilities. "Thankfully, we got some guys who are explosive and can run and hit." . . . In addition to Major's interception, cornerback Jimmy Smith had one pick with a 47-yard return . . . Stewart and Clemons worked as punt returners . . . With campus virtually shutting down next week for spring break, the Buffs don't return to practice until Monday, March 29. They have eight practices remaining, including the Spring Game on Saturday, April 10.

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## Passing midterm? Coach says Buffs are not playing clean enough

By Patrick Ridgell  
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BOULDER — Thursday's scrimmage marked the unofficial halfway point for Colorado spring football, which will have eight practices left, including April 10's spring game, when the team reconvenes March 29 after spring break. So far, so good?

"We have to get a lot cleaner," head coach Dan Hawkins said. "Penalties, turnovers, some of that kind of stuff, not dropping the ball. I think the defense has had the upper hand at this point."

Thursday's scrimmage, which emphasized third downs, red zone play and special teams, included 163 plays, 10 penalties and six touchdowns. Coaches said the plan was to give quarterbacks Tyler Hansen and Cody Hawkins equal snaps, but Hawkins threw 44 passes to Hansen's 29, and 59.1 percent of his throws to Hansen's 55.2. Offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said they entered Thursday completing almost 70 percent of their passes through the first six spring practices.

Hawkins led the offense to 33 points; Hansen to 10. It gained 227 yards in 56 plays behind Hawkins; 179 in 47 behind Hansen.

Coaches have maintained the passing game will receive more attention, with the program down to four running backs in spring. It averaged 3.9 yards per carry Thursday. Kiesau said CU must be smart in how it approaches the run game, but added it's something that must be looked at, too.

Thursday's worst result might have been the injury receiver Scotty McKnight sustained. Last season's leading receiver, McKnight fell to the ground on the west sideline after catching a pass. He left the field on a cart and did not return.

CU reported late Thursday night that McKnight has a lower leg/ankle injury. Team doctors will examine it again this morning. An MRI revealed nothing "peculiar," and McKnight's Achilles' tendon is fine. He left the Dal Ward Center on Thursday wearing a boot.

There has been no determination of how long McKnight will be out.

Some individual stars included linebacker Jon Major, who intercepted a pass and returned it 41 yards before Rodney Stewart tripped him to save the touchdown. Tight end Clark Evans, converting from quarterback, caught five passes for 38 yards, showing sure hands. And kicker Zach Grossnickle hit all four of his field goals.

Otherwise, there's plenty to emphasize after spring break ends.

"The first thing is we had obviously too many penalties," Kiesau said. "I'm glad they called every one of them. And way too many dropped balls. And then we have to work on cleaning up the offensive line a little bit, getting those guys to play."



CU quarterback Cody Hawkins drops back during a scrimmage Thursday at Folsom Field. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**



"I told (the offense) they have the week here, spring break, to relax. When we come back we have two more weeks and we have to get some work done. We have to continue to grind and stay on them. I think right now it's as simple as it can be. We just have to continue to get better and go play.

"Today was definitely not what I wanted to get out of it."

CU owned the Big 12's worst turnover margin — minus-6 — in 2009. Its 8.92 penalties per game ranked 118th-most among the 120 Division I programs. On Thursday, Hawkins and Hansen threw one interception each. There were two forced fumbles.

Hawkins said the defense is more confident and playing faster, both results of experience. Defensive coordinator Ron Collins said his group need to clean up "little techniques."

"It's spring ball, and to me that's what spring ball is for," Collins said. "Guys have to keep improving.

"You always have a mix of the guys that have played a lot and so you expect them to play at a higher level than the younger guys. But then you start mixing in the younger guys and sometimes they make mistakes. So it doesn't look as clean as when you're in the season and you have the same 11 guys doing the same thing all the time."

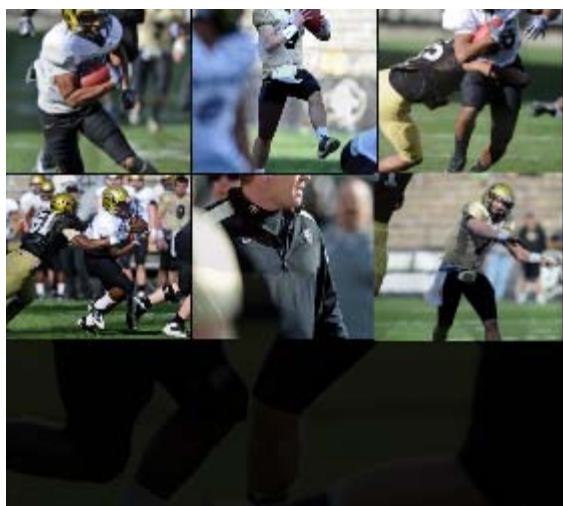
**EXTRA POINTS:** Grossnickle averaged 37.2 yards per on nine punts. No other Buff punted. Coaches are stressing hang time, and Grossnickle said his times were mixed. CU finished last in the Big 12 in net punting last year, 31.9 yards per try. ... Dan Hawkins said he would not be adverse to using one player to kick and punt. Senior placekicker Aric Goodman went 1-for-3, hitting from 26 yards and missing from 33 and 37. ... Hawkins lauded redshirt freshman Parker Orms, who's slated to replace Cha'pelle Brown at nickel back. He's playing "extremely fast," Hawkins said. Orms made a scrimmage-high 11 tackles, including three for losses and three third down stops. ... Cody Hawkins hit Will Jefferson on a 44-yard touchdown for the scrimmage's longest play. ... Rodney Stewart and Toney Clemons took the bulk of the turns at punt return. Andre Simmons, Brian Lockridge and Kendrick Celestine were deep on kickoffs.

# Hansen, Hawkins 'dead even'

## Bufs QBs split reps, produce similar results in scrimmage

**By Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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Hansen's assessment of the competition to this point.

"To me, it's dead even right now," Hansen said. "So we've got to compete and make plays. I've got to do better. I can't have an OK day anymore. I've got to have a great day."

Any of the estimated 250 who attended the 2 hour, 15 minute scrimmage would likely confirm the offense is well behind the defense at this point. And as coach Dan Hawkins said afterward, chronic problems that haunted the team last season, such as penalties and sacks, need to get cleaned up.

The offense also suffered a setback late in the scrimmage when senior wide receiver Scotty McKnight suffered a lower leg/ankle injury. He has not been ruled out for the remainder of spring ball yet, but he is wearing a boot.

Offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau said he has been keeping track of the competition in detail down to the last rep this spring.

"It's a huge scale on how I'm grading them," he said. "It's very time consuming."

He said going into the scrimmage Hansen and Hawkins had combined to complete about 70 percent of all the passes they had thrown and both players were doing very well. He wasn't as happy with the results of the scrimmage.

Hansen completed 16 of 29 passes for 139 yards and a touchdown. He also threw an interception, and should have been intercepted on another occasion but cornerback Paul Vigo dropped the ball.

Hawkins completed 26 of 44 passes for 194 yards and four touchdowns. He also threw an interception, which would have been returned for a touchdown by Jimmy Smith if not for a touchdown-saving tackle by Brian Lockridge.

Both quarterbacks were sacked three times.

Colorado fans probably don't want to hear it, read it or acknowledge it, but a quarterback battle is brewing in Boulder if the results of the first scrimmage of spring ball are any indication.

Junior Tyler Hansen and senior Cody Hawkins used evenly split opportunities Thursday afternoon at Folsom Field to produce similar results. However, Hawkins won on the scoreboard with four touchdown passes to Hansen's one.

Hawkins was the starter for the first five games last season as well as the two previous seasons. Hansen was the starter for the final seven games last fall, but hasn't been able to capitalize on that experience to create clear separation in the eyes of coaches between himself and the teammate he replaced.

Forget what coaches have to say or the coach's son for that matter. Perhaps the most telling indication of where things stand after seven spring practices and one scrimmage is

"Before today, I thought we were progressing well," Kiesau said. "We still have two weeks. Thank goodness."

Completion percentages for the quarterbacks could have been slightly higher if receivers had done a better job of catching the ball. Kiesau noted there were too many dropped passes in the scrimmage, including one on the first play of the day when Hansen found McKnight wide open down the left side. Hawkins also was victimized when Will Jefferson dropped what would have been the fifth touchdown pass of the day for Hawkins.

"I think those guys, and I said this a couple years ago, you could probably split them with a hair," Dan Hawkins said of the competition between his son and Hansen.

Freshmen quarterbacks Seth Lobato and Nick Hirschman also had several opportunities each to direct the team. They combined to complete nine of 16 passes for 28 yards.

The scrimmage covered 163 plays, including special teams. There were eight penalties.

Six different receivers caught at least four passes led by Jefferson, who finished the day with six catches for 81 yards and a touchdown. Toney Clemons and Clark Evans each caught five passes.

Dan Hawkins said it is "a little bit" typical that the defense would be ahead of the offense at this point in the year. Overall, he said there were too many penalties in the scrimmage, but he was happy with the defense, particularly its ability to pressure the quarterback.

"We just have to clean a lot of things up," Hawkins said. "We just have to get a lot cleaner. You know, penalties, turnovers, some of that kind of stuff. Not dropping the ball."

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## Woelk: Buff defense looks to be all about business

**Neill Woelk** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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It's March.

It's spring ball.

There are still eight practices to go in the spring, a summer of offseason drills and conditioning workouts on the horizon, and another month of fall drills to go before Colorado's season opener (Sept. 4 vs. Colorado State, since you asked).

In other words, it's early. Too early to be worried about the details. Too early to start losing sleep over such things as ... well, to be honest, too doggoned early to get worked up over anything concerning college football (unless you live in Nebraska or anywhere south of the Mason-Dixon Line — and if that's the case, my sympathies.)

But for folks with all of their teeth and most of their mental faculties, spring ball should be simple. A diversion. It's an opportunity for players to work on fundamentals and chance for coaches to work on something other than their short game. It's a chance for fans to check in with their team when they're not worrying about their NCAA bracket (Marquette, Georgetown and Vandy all gone the first day?), dreaming of opening day at the ball yard or lining up tee times.

Which brings us back to Thursday's CU scrimmage at Folsom Field, the first of the spring.

The couple hundred folks who showed up for the workout saw this:

Defense good. Offense not so much.

If you had to pick the best quarterback of the day, it would probably be Cody Hawkins. Best receiver? Will Jefferson. Best running back? Rodney Stewart (I don't care what the stats say), with an honorable-mention nod to walk-on Quentin Hildreth. Best linebacker? Take your pick from Jon Major, Michael Sipili or B.J. Beatty.

But if you had to pick the best player of the day, it might have been Parker Orms.

Who? That would be freshman safety Parker Orms, all 5-11, 180 pounds of him.

Orms was everywhere — well, at least everywhere the ball went. Orms finished the day with a team-high 11 tackles, three tackles for losses, a quarterback sack and three third-down stops.

Not bad for a kid who started the spring at the bottom of the depth chart, but has already found a home in CU's nickel package.

"He's a baller," declared Buff cornerback Jimmy Smith, who turned in his usual complement of nice plays, including a nifty interception on the goal line. "We always knew he was speedy. But his instincts are really surprising. He tackles, he's aggressive ... he's just a baller."

Healthy words of praise from a senior who could be hearing his name on the first day of the NFL Draft a year from now.

But Smith can afford to be gracious. While Orms might have stolen the show on Thursday, fact is, Smith might be the best player in a CU uniform every time the Buffs leave the locker room.

Smith is no longer a gangly kid making up for inexperience with athleticism and instinct. He's now a young man who knows where he's supposed to be, knows what he's supposed to do and has the ability to get it done.

And he will no doubt be one of the leaders of a defense that next fall may have to be the cornerstone of any success CU enjoys.

"This year, it's all about business," Smith said. "Don't get me wrong, it's still fun.

"But we came in this spring with an emphasis on turnovers and being aggressive, and that's what we're doing. We still have a couple of pieces to put together, but so far, the defense is doing good."

The aggressive attitude was evident in the scrimmage. There's no hesitation, no tentativeness. Along with Smith's interception — which he returned 47 yards for the longest play of the day — the Buff defense also got an interception from Major (41-yard return), a couple of forced fumbles and seven sacks.

Right behind Orms in the tackle department was safety Vince Ewing with 10, followed by Sipili (nine) and Major (seven). And, there was a five-tackle, two-sack day from Beatty.

Of course, all those numbers came at the expense of CU's offense, which showed no signs of a steady running game and had only inconsistent play at quarterback.

Not that there aren't some promising signs. Former QB Clark Evans looked good at tight end, as did DaVaughn Thornton. Jefferson and Toney Clemons are legit receivers.

But as CU head coach Dan Hawkins noted, the defense has had the upper hand for most of the spring.

"They're more confident," Hawkins noted. "There's not as much new. They've been in the saddle a little while."

Yep, it's March. Lots and lots will change before next September. But if CU's defense continues at its current pace, there will be some promise there.

Now, about that bracket ...

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## CU's McKnight suffers leg injury in scrimmage

**Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado wide receiver Scotty McKnight planned to spend a restful spring break in New Jersey with his best friend, New York Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez, who is recuperating from surgery on his left knee.

McKnight still plans to head east for the week, but he will be doing so on crutches with an injured leg of his own to worry about. The senior was hurt late in the first of three spring scrimmages Thursday and did not return to action.

McKnight caught a ball along the west sideline and was forced out of bounds by defenders. He ran hard into the wall and railing and appeared to step awkwardly there. He went down in pain and had to be helped from the field.

Coach Dan Hawkins said he did not have a report on McKnight's injury after the scrimmage, but quarterback Tyler Hansen said McKnight was in a boot and on crutches and had told him he suffered a broken fibula and would miss the remainder of spring drills.

CU head athletic trainer Miguel Rueda told sports information director Dave Plati that nothing peculiar was visible on a magnetic resonance imaging test that was performed and doctors would review the test today. Rueda told Plati how much

time McKnight misses remains to be determined.

If the bone is broken, it is the second time in McKnight's career he has suffered a broken leg during spring drills. He broke his ankle on the first day of spring practices back in 2007 as a redshirt freshman, but healed in time to play in all 12 games that season, catching 43 passes to lead the team.

McKnight ended his junior season last fall just two catches shy of tying Michael Westbrook as the program's career leader in receptions. He has caught 165 passes for 1,900 yards in his career. He needs 649 receiving yards next season to pass Westbrook as the program's career leader in receiving yards.

### Nice kicks

Kickers have had a tough start to spring ball this year with a slew of wobbly, short punts and missed field goals in practices.

Redshirt freshman Zach Grossnickle rebounded nicely Thursday during the scrimmage with several high, hanging punts and making all four of his field goals for 32, 34, 38 and 32 yards. He averaged 37 yards on nine punts with a long of 44 yards.

"Kicking in front of people, I think, helps for some reason," Grossnickle said. "I don't know why. I guess so I don't embarrass myself. Honestly, I think it's more of a game situation. So I'm focusing more and getting it up and out."

Walk-on Marcus Kirkwood might have the early inside track on the kickoff job if he can continue to put the ball into or out of the end zone. He produced two touchbacks Thursday.

Senior place-kicker Aric Goodman made one of three field goals, converting from 26 yards and missing wide left from 33 yards and wide right from 37 yards.

### Defense tough

The truth of Thursday's scrimmage is the offense struggled to put together many sustained drives and would not have scored even as much as it did without redzone periods and third-down situational drills.

The defense played relatively well outside of a few blown coverages. Parker Orms led the team with 11 total tackles, safety Vince Ewing had 10.

Linebacker Jon Major might have had the best overall day with seven total tackles, including three for losses a half-sack and intercepting a pass from Tyler Hansen.

"I was just trying to do what I was supposed to do," Major said. "Had fun on that return. Kind of back to the glory days."

Major said one the goals of the defense is to limit offenses to 3.3 yards per carry on the ground or less. The offense averaged 3.9 yards per carry, but it wasn't close to that if more than 40 yards gained on quarterback scrambles is subtracted.

**Notable**

Wide receiver Andre Simmons was the first man to handle the ball Thursday, returning the opening kickoff 22 yards. He did not touch the ball again and spent much of the remainder of the scrimmage on the sideline. It was not clear if he suffered an injury. ... The Buffs have 10 days off and return to the practice fields March 29 for the final eight sessions of spring.

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