

Time to produce is now for CU Buff linebacker Ahles

Little-known LB looks to gain recognition with effort on field

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Colorado coach Dan Hawkins spoke often last season of the potential of his freshmen redshirts and how they would likely make a splash when they became eligible to play this year.

Some of those players such as Parker Orms, Deji Olatoye and DaVaughn Thornton turned in solid spring performances, proving Hawkins' point.

But if the Buffs are going to turn things around under the current coaching staff, those young players can only be counted on for so much. It's their older teammates who have been in the program for awhile and have yet to make their mark who must emerge or raise their level of play for the Buffs to finally produce a winning season under Hawkins.

Junior linebacker Tyler Ahles is one of those veterans, and he's well aware his time has arrived.

"I feel like it's all about showing up, making plays, being productive," he said. "That's really one of my main goals this season is to be productive."

Ahles will begin his fourth year in Boulder when he reports for camp in August. He was recruited to CU from San Bernardino, Calif., as a middle linebacker, but made the switch before last season to the hybrid-defensive end/outside linebacker position in the CU defense known as LIZ.

Most Colorado fans would probably struggle to identify Ahles without a jersey number or a media guide because he has been overshadowed by other linebackers during his career. Some might be surprised to know Ahles played in all 12 games last season and even started two.

Ahles said the lack of recognition for his efforts doesn't bother him, but he would like that to change because if it does, it means he is producing.

He finished last season with 26 tackles, including four for losses, a sack and a forced fumble.

Ahles hopes to raise those numbers significantly during his junior season. He said the area he is most focused on improving his pass rushing, a skill he didn't use much as a middle linebacker in high school and his first two years in Boulder.

"Pass rushing is probably the weakest part of my game, and it's something I've been trying to develop. I don't have a goal as far as like so many sacks. I'd like to get in there though and show up."

CU coaches often talk to players about championship effort, which means one play of production for every four or five plays a player is on the field. The measure of production varies by position. Tackles, assisted tackles, taking on two blockers, sacks and quarterback pressures are the main ways in which Ahles can meet the mark.

"If I can do that, there is no reason people shouldn't see me," Ahles said.

Ahles actually could get noticed on offense first.

He emerged from spring ball atop the depth chart at fullback. He played the position a little in high school and with no fullbacks on the roster this spring, coaches gave him and fellow linebacker Derrick Webb opportunities to block in short-yardage situations.

Whether he sees action on offense this season will depend on how much coaches decide to use the fullback and whether any of the four recruited running backs slated to join the program this summer are capable of filling the role as true freshmen.

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Can Greg Reid help the Florida State defense look more like 'Noles units of old?

1. Colorado WR Toney Clemons. Not to put too much pressure on Clemons, but he's the key to Colorado's season. And he has yet to play a down in Boulder. The Michigan transfer gives the Buffs a dynamic deep threat in the [passing game](#) and a burner in space on speed sweeps and bubble screens. "I've been developing route techniques, learning coverages, polishing my skills," Clemons says. "I feel like I'm coming into my own now. People didn't see the true potential of this team. Hopefully I can help change that."

2. Florida State CB Greg Reid. Reid worked on his turn-and-chase cover skills this spring and is more fluid in his hips. The Seminoles won't play as much man coverage under new coordinator [Mark Stoops](#) but when they do, Reid will be the team's lockdown corner.

3. Michigan QB Denard Robinson. Michigan coach [Rich Rodriguez](#) is desperate for Robinson, a fleet runner still learning the nuances of the passing game, to win the starting job. Robinson, a sophomore, looked terrific in the running game and made strides as a thrower this spring.

4. UCLA TE Joseph Fauria. The Bruins haven't had this type of athletic threat down the seams since [Mercedes Lewis](#) five years ago. Fauria, a Notre Dame transfer, is a matchup

nightmare in the secondary—a 6-7, 260-pound target who will run past linebackers.

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5. North Carolina DE Michael McAdoo. He was more active this spring as a pass rusher and as an anchor end against the run, finally using his sinewy frame (6-7, 245) to his advantage. He dominated the spring game with four sacks and an interception.

Matt Hayes covers college football for Sporting News and is an analyst for the NFL Network. Tune in to Total Access weeknights. E-mail him at mhayes@sportingnews.com.

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