

# Cody Hawkins sat out scrimmage

## But junior still in running to start at quarterback

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

Posted:

Several of the privileged few allowed to attend the final scrimmage of Colorado fall camp last Saturday emerged from Folsom Field believing Tyler Hansen had won the starting quarterback job.

That was a false start, at least at that point.

Cody Hawkins confirmed he did not take a snap in the scrimmage because of an undisclosed physical problem. Hawkins stood on the sidelines wearing headphones and watching Hansen play much of the scrimmage but has since returned healthy. The scrimmage was closed to the media and public.

The extra work probably did Hansen good because he had missed two days of practice last week battling a case of the flu.

Coach Dan Hawkins and offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau have not publicly named a starting quarterback for the season opener Sunday against Colorado State, and they don't plan to reveal their choice before kickoff.

"I just think it's funny that it's such a big deal," Dan Hawkins said Wednesday night during his radio show at the Draft House in downtown Boulder.

Cody Hawkins held an advantage in the competition entering fall camp last month and seemed to be getting the majority of the practice repetitions with the first team early in camp when practices were open to the public.

Kiesau and Dan Hawkins have repeatedly said in the weeks since that the competition is close and they feel like they have two solid choices.

Hansen also has said he believes he has made up ground in the race.

Cody Hawkins said Wednesday that he doesn't feel that sitting out the final scrimmage set him back at all.

"I think the last scrimmage is a time when a lot of people can gear up and stuff," Hawkins said. "I think it's huge that you get an entire week of game prep and then you get to play. Now we're coming out and doing the same thing until we play Colorado State on Sunday.

"I think preparation is obviously really important and the scrimmage obviously plays into that."

Sports information director Dave Plati said this year's quarterback battle is only the seventh in the past 18 years in the program. In 11 of those seasons, the program entered fall camp with no significant competition for its returning starter.

If Hawkins is named the starter, he will be the first player to earn the job in three consecutive seasons since former Buff Joel Klatt did so from 2003 to 2005. Klatt set 44 school records during his career and many of those marks could fall to Hawkins if he earns the job and keeps it all season.

Hawkins enters his junior season with 4,585 career passing yards, fewer than 3,000 yards behind Klatt. He also needs 19 touchdown passes to tie Klatt's 44.

Klatt played in 38 games over four seasons. Hawkins already has 24 games under his belt plus a start in the 2007 Independence Bowl.

Hansen has far less experience with five games under his belt, sharing time with Hawkins in four of them. He threw for 280 yards as a true freshman last season and one touchdown.

That difference in experience has many Buff fans and members of the media believing Hawkins will ultimately be under center on Sunday evening.

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## Kicker Davis ends career

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

Posted: 09/03/2009 12:14:19 AM MDT

Sophomore place-kicker Jameson Davis has decided to end his football career after five knee surgeries.

Davis underwent the latest of those procedures earlier this year and was going through a slow recovery that prevented him from doing much in fall camp. His departure leaves junior Aric Goodman as the only place-kicker with any experience on the roster and Goodman is coming off a season in which he made only five of 14 field-goal attempts.

Ryan Aweida, a former Broomfield soccer player who transferred from the University of Denver, and true freshman Zach Grossnickle will back up Goodman.

"I know for him, he is thinking about his quality of life when he gets older," Goodman said. "It's the reality of the game, and we'll miss him."

Goodman said he has been impressed with the progress Aweida has made. He said he doesn't think there would be much of a drop off if the team needed either Aweida or Grossnickle to kick.

"They both kind of came in a little bit raw, but right now they're both kicking the ball really well. I think the confidence in both of them has really shot through the roof."

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# Shields ready for starting assignment

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

Posted: 09/03/2009 12:13:54 AM MDT

The last time Lagrone Shields earned significant playing time during a football season, he ended his senior year of high school back in Memphis, Tenn., with 17 quarterback sacks.

He probably won't come near that total as he returns to the dogfights in the trenches this season at the Big 12 level, but he has to start somewhere.

Shields, a third-year sophomore, has earned the starting job at right defensive end in a defense that might not even use four down linemen much of the time this season because of a dearth of experience there.

Shields is looking forward to whatever playing time he gets. He played in two games last season in mop-up time, earning two snaps in both games. It is very limited experience on which to draw, but it did teach him a little something.

"In those couple of snaps, I realized that it was a lot faster than practice," Shields said. "So even though it was only four snaps, I can still tell the difference between practice and an actual game."

Shields said all the early morning workouts in the offseason, spring practices and time spent on the scout team have been worth it now that his opportunity is at hand.

"Anything worth having is worth working hard for," he said. "I had to do my time and put in my work to get on the field. It took two years, but I guess it's finally paying off."

Shields and the rest of his friends on the defensive line are viewed as a possible weak link in the CU defense. The secondary is rich with talent and the linebackers are two deep at every position.

The greenhorns on the line will get a stiff test right from the start Sunday against a Colorado State offensive line that ranks as the most experienced in the nation.

"It's throwing us into the fire early," Shields said. "We get to go against the best of the best. I mean, they've been there for four or five years. They know the ropes. They're probably going to be some of the most experienced linemen that we're going to see. That's a good thing to get that early in the season. So we kind of know what to expect for the next 11 games."

## Zimmer honored

Longtime CU radio announcer Larry Zimmer will be honored during Sunday's game.

Zimmer is the 2009 recipient of the Chris Schenkel Award from the National Football Foundation. The award honors excellence in the field by a broadcaster with a long relationship with a single institution.

## Streaker

Junior wide receiver Scotty McKnight has caught at least one pass in every game during his playing career. The streak spans 24 regular season games and one bowl game over the past two seasons.

McKnight said he was only recently made aware of the streak and he wouldn't be crushed if it ended. He is within three games of tying the school mark for consecutive games with a reception set by Charles E. Johnson, who caught balls in 27 straight games between 1991 and 1993.

"None of those things really matter too much to me," he said. "Wins is what I want to do. That definitely takes precedence over everything."

The sports information staff at Central Michigan researched the subject in the offseason and found that only seven players in Football Bowl Championship Subdivision have more consecutive games with at least one catch.

McKnight has caught 89 passes over the past two seasons to lead the Buffs. He already ranks among the top 21 receivers in CU history in receptions (89), receiving yards (1,007) and receiving touchdowns (9).

**Notable**

Josh Moten is the third member of the 2009 CU football recruiting class to be ruled academically ineligible at CU, according to notes released by the sports information staff. ... The Buffs are 10-for-10 inside the red zone during the three season openers under Dan Hawkins. They have scored six touchdowns and four field goals on those possessions. ... Linebacker Michael Sipili is questionable for Sunday's game with a sprained knee.

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Sep 2, 2009 10:51 pm US/Mountain

## Hawkins Or Hansen?



Reporting  
[Eric Christensen](#)  
[E-mail](#)

DENVER (CBS4) — On Sunday night when CU hosts CSU who will be the Buffs starting quarterback? It's a valid question and one that hasn't been answered (at least publically) since the Buffs began fall camp in early August.

Let's meet the two candidates:

Junior Cody Hawkins is the incumbent. Cody has started 22 games as a freshman and sophomore and is already 6th all-time on the school's list for most passing yards. He's a cerebral QB who's greatest strength is his head and ability to lead. Oh, did we mention he's the coach's son?

Sophomore Tyler Hansen is the challenger. Hansen has started 2 games. He showed flashes of brilliance and provided the Buffs with a more athletic option at quarterback but still threw 4 interceptions against only 1 touchdown and looked overwhelmed during his true freshman season. Plus, he broke his hand during the spring game forcing him to miss 2 months of team organized workouts in the summer.

On paper this looks like a no-brainer. Hawkins has the edge in productivity, experience and family lineage. So why hasn't Dan Hawkins and new offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau named Cody the starter? Since recent practices and scrimmages have been closed to the media, inquiring minds like myself are left to speculate.

If ever the situation was set up for Cody to be QB1, then this fall was it. But apparently, he hasn't separated himself as the starter. Somewhere along the line, Tyler Hansen has made this a legitimate quarterback competition. I did attend the only fall scrimmage that was open to the public and media. Of course the Buffs were very vanilla during that scrimmage and admitted to only using a sliver of the playbook. Still, it was obvious that Hansen has made serious strides during the latter part of the summer and fall camp. While neither quarterback played poorly, Hansen did outplay his junior counterpart. Tyler averaged 9.1 yards per pass attempt while Cody averaged 6.3. Hansen led the Buffs in rushing with 58 yards while Cody managed only 19.

What Hansen gives Colorado a better athlete behind center and potentially a better playmaker. Based on last season, Colorado is in dire need of as many playmakers as they can find. Last year CU ranked dead last in the Big 12 in both scoring offense and total yards. If the Buffs hope to come close to reaching Dan Hawkins challenge of 10 wins, they have to be significantly better on offense.

So if the quarterback competition is truly too close to call then who will get the start vs. CSU on Sunday night? Hansen would be my choice but right now I'm not sure it matters. I believe you'll see both quarterbacks. Rotating quarterbacks is always a risky proposition, one CU employed in the 2nd half of the season last year, but if the Buffs coaching staff hasn't been able to determine a clear cut winner, I believe they owe it to both to extend the competition into the regular season.

Some say this won't work and will ultimately tear the team apart. I say Cody Hawkins won't let that happen. He's the ultimate team guy and his reaction to Tyler Hansen's first career touchdown pass was evidence of that. Hansen replaced Hawkins in the first half against Kansas State last year and when he tossed his first scoring strike, Hawkins was the first player to greet him with genuine sincerity. Hansen also took one for the team last year when he agreed to "take off" his redshirt midway thru his freshman season. No matter what happens, both quarterbacks are team first guys.

"If it ends up being a rotating system and that's what's best for us, then that's what we'll do," said Hawkins. If it ends up being just one guy, then the other guy will fight like hell to be the best backup in the nation. If Tyler beats me out and I'm doing everything I can and everything right, then he beats me out. It's much more important to me that I give everything I can to help the football team and not focus on just beating out Tyler. I have to be the best I can be."

Cody wasn't at his best last year but neither were the Buffs. A healthier offensive line and a stable of potentially explosive running backs should significantly help whomever is behind center. Ideally, I think you'd like to name a clear cut starter before conference play begins. Until then I believe Cody and Tyler deserve the opportunity to win the job when it really matters.

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## DTs Pericak, Cunningham start up front at CU

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/03/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — As perhaps is befitting of an in-state rivalry game, two Colorado natives are expected to start at defensive tackle for Colorado in Sunday's season opener against Colorado State.

CU defensive line coach Romeo Bandison said Wednesday he plans to give redshirt freshman Will Pericak (6-feet-4, 280 pounds) the starting nod. The Boulder High School graduate was listed on the second line of this week's depth chart but evidently has moved ahead of sophomore Eugene Goree.

"Will has earned it in practice," Bandison said. "He's a hard worker, goes 100 miles an hour, never takes a down off. I'm going to have him for four years. I'm excited about that."

Pericak (pronounced Pre-check) will team with sophomore tackle Curtis Cunningham in the

opening lineup. Cunningham (6-1, 275) was a two-time All-Colorado player at Columbine and had been projected as a starter this season after playing in all 12 games as a reserve in 2008.

"All of us have just been working hard in practice," Pericak said. "We're excited for the season to start."

Pericak was recruited out of high school as a linebacker or a tight end. He also took a recruiting trip to CSU, but there was little doubt about where he would end up. Two siblings are Buffaloes, and their mother, Wynn, is an assistant to the vice president of administration for the CU system.

After his first week of practice last fall, Pericak was moved from tight end to the defensive line. He redshirted to get bigger and stronger and earned the CU's defensive scout team award for his effort through the season.

"I was all for the move to defense," Pericak said. "I was already big for a tight end."

Coach Dan Hawkins has frequently praised Pericak's hard work in the weight room and his motor on the field.

"He doesn't say two words but is just going to give you everything he's got on every play," Hawkins said.

### Footnotes.

Hawkins, on beginning a season against CSU: "It

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is huge. You're starting the season and it's a rivalry game, so you've kind of got two things riding on it." . . . Hawkins said three true freshmen will play Sunday: defensive linemen Nate Bonsu and Forrest West and wide receiver Will Jefferson. . . . There is still no decision on whether freshman defensive end Nick Kasa (MCL tear in left knee) will need surgery, Hawkins said.

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## Sage gets back in the game at CU

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Posted: 09/03/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT



CU assistant coach Bob Foster already has his game face on Wednesday, four days before the Rocky Mountain Showdown with Colorado State. (Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Having "unretired" four times, 68-year-old Bob Foster said he can never be certain when it's time to finally hang up the clipboard. But the Colorado linebackers coach is sure of one thing: No more wind sprints with the team after practice.

"My running days are over for a while," Foster

said Wednesday with a chuckle, referring to his mishap last week. "See that discoloration? I pulled a hamstring. I was figuring I was going to run right by those 'Sam' (strong-side) linebackers.

"I was gaining on them. I was going to pass them. And then just when I sped up, boy, that thing popped. That's when I went down."

Foster jumps into every opportunity with the enthusiasm of a coach just starting out. Such was the case when Buffs coach Dan Hawkins gave his old friend and mentor a call in the spring.

Out of football for two years, Foster had just returned from a vacation in Mexico to his home near Klamath Falls, Ore., when the phone rang. Hawkins had just lost offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich to Oregon and was looking to shuffle his staff. Hawkins had an opening for one year until CU technical defensive intern Ashley Ambrose, an NFL defensive back for 13 years, would be ready to take over as a full-time assistant in 2010 as a receivers coach.

Foster accepted the challenge as a favor to a friend of nearly three decades.

"Every time I get asked to come out of retirement, it's hard to say no because I love the players so much," Foster said. "I guess I haven't been able to figure this retirement thing out.

"But coaching really enriches my life. To be able to come to Colorado, work with Coach Hawkins and be with these young men, it's just a wonderful thing."

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Hawkins played fullback at Cal-Davis in the early 1980s when Foster was the defensive coordinator and linebackers coach.

"I really think Coach Hawkins wanted to be a linebacker, and I wanted him over there," Foster said. "But fullbacks and linebackers are about the same animal anyway."

Foster later became head coach at Cal-Davis and then was an assistant at Oregon and California. This season, he is coaching the outside linebackers, leaving longtime assistant coach Brian Cabral more time to focus on the inside linebackers.

Junior linebacker B.J. Beatty said he loves Foster's "old-school" approach but is quick to point out that Foster is full of energy — even if he is the oldest paid coach for any sport in CU history.

"He really likes us to get aggressive. He likes us to attack," Beatty said.

"He's very active," added Douglas Rippy, a redshirt freshman linebacker. "If he doesn't like something we're doing, he'll jump in there and show us."

Hawkins was the instigator when Foster was coaxed out of retirement the first time in 1995. Hawkins was the head coach at Willamette, a small school in Salem, Ore. Two years later, with the pair roaming the sidelines together, Willamette went 13-1 and won the NAIA national championship.

Hawkins likes to tell the story of a Willamette game when Foster said he had better get a defensive back in a certain spot or the opposing receiver would be open for a big gain. Hawkins said to Foster, "Coach, that (defensive back) must be the stupidest guy in America, because I've told him 1,000 times and he still doesn't get it."

Foster did not hesitate with his response.

"You must be the stupidest coach in America,"

*A look at Bob Foster's coaching career. As head coach at Division II Cal-Davis, Foster was 30-11-1:*

Season	School	Coaching Pos.
2006	California	Linebackers
2002	California	Linebackers
1998-99	Oregon	Def. coordinator, LBs
1995-97	Willamette	Def. consultant
1989-92	Cal-Davis	Head coach
1978-88	Cal-Davis	Def. coordinator
1971-77	Cal-Davis	Linebackers
1965-70	Vanden HS	Asst. coach
1963-64	Cal-Davis	Freshman coach

he told Hawkins, "because if you told this guy 1,000 times and he still doesn't get it, you're a lousy teacher."

"I was like, 'Hmm, OK, I hear you,' " Hawkins recalled. "I guess I better figure out something different." "

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Foster is a son of a coach. His father played for legendary coach Amos Alonzo Stagg at Pacific and passed down a coaching style that's often understated, simplified and philosophical, which Hawkins appreciates.

"(Foster) has such a great way about him," Hawkins said. "He draws out the best in players. If you were the fourth-team guy or the first-team guy, you'd jump on a spear for him."

Cabral said he makes Foster's office his first stop each morning.

"He brings a different perspective," Cabral said. "He's kind of got an outside view, looking inside. He's not so caught up in all the little things. He sees things that stand out to him. He's so experienced. When a guy like that talks, you've got to listen."

*Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or  
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## Knowing Coach Foster

*After starting his coaching career in 1963, Bob Foster has a few words he has come to live by:*

"I'm not a guy with a lot of goals. A lot of goals that you have will take care of themselves if you play real hard with confidence, play within the system and trust your teammates."

"Losing doesn't make you a bad person. If you get beat in a game, hey, maybe your opponent was real good. Just play hard, play within the

rules and go about your business."

"Coaches say, 'Play within yourself.' To me, that means you have a certain energy level that your body deals with. When your energy is low, you sleep. When you fight, your energy is real high. Somewhere in between is where you perform at your best. Each player has to find that."

"My dad, who was a coach, used to say this: 'Never run across speed. Always run at it.' You can put that philosophy in life too. Don't swim upstream; go with the current."

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### [What to watch in the Big 12 this week](#)

September 3, 2009 8:28 AM

*Posted by ESPN.com's Tim Griffin*

Here are some things I'm watching across the Big 12 this week, starting with Iowa State's season opener against North Dakota State tonight in Ames, Iowa.

**1. Can Oklahoma State prove it belongs among the national powers?** Oklahoma State started 8-1 before collapsing with four losses in its final six games in 2008, including struggling defensive performances against Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oregon. The Cowboys will be depleted without MLB Orle Lemon and will be facing a Georgia team that shouldn't be intimidated by the crowd at Boone Pickens Stadium. The Bulldogs are 30-4 on the road since Mark Richt took over in 2001 -- a better winning percentage than for their home games. Georgia is 10-2 on the road against ranked teams on the road under Richt, including 3-1 against top-10 foes. So it will be a huge challenge for the Cowboys to counter those trends, particularly with a roster that has been dotted with defections this week.

**2. Oklahoma's retooled offensive line:** The Sooners' offensive line has been the team's biggest question coming into the season as they try for an unprecedented fourth straight Big 12 title. Four offensive line starters are gone from last season's team, leaving only left tackle Trent Williams back to protect Heisman Trophy winner [Sam Bradford](#). The Sooners' line was called out before spring practice because of their lack of dedication by coach Bob Stoops, but has received recent praise after working with the Sooners' monstrous defensive line in recent weeks. The Sooners shouldn't be tested very much by a BYU defense that ranked 60th in rushing defense and 59th in total defense last season.

**3. Does Baylor deserve its early hype?** The Bears started last season with a 28-point home loss to Wake Forest. This season, they are a slight underdog on the road against the Demon Deacons. Can Robert Griffin continue his mercurial development and lead the Bears to an upset against the Demon Deacons, who have qualified for three straight bowl games? The Bears have lost 13 of their last 14 road games and have never won away from Waco with Art Briles coaching them. Does an improved, senior-laden team have what it takes to win -- especially with two new tackles protecting Griffin's flanks?

**4. Blaine Gabbert's first career start for Missouri:** All the sophomore quarterback has to do is pick up the reins from Chase Daniel, who piloted the Tigers to back-to-back trips to the Big 12 title game and arguably was the best quarterback in school history. Gabbert was a higher regarded prospect coming into school than Daniel and will be able to prove those ratings, but he'll be facing the challenge of playing in his home area against arch-rival Illinois.

**5. Vondrell McGee's chance as Texas' featured running back:** McGee took advantage of an injury to Fozzy Whittaker to claim the starting position and an

- [Brian Bennett](#)
- Brian Bennett joined ESPN.com in August 2008 after nine years at The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky., where he covered college sports and the University of Louisville beat. He lives in Louisville.
- [Heather Dinich](#)
- Heather Dinich covered ACC and Big Ten football for five seasons before joining ESPN.com in November 2007. She's an Indiana grad but somehow her favorite day of the week is Saturday.
- [Tim Griffin](#)
- Tim Griffin joined ESPN.com in February 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.
- [Chris Low](#)
- Chris Low joined ESPN.com in 2007 after 10 years with The (Nashville) Tennessean covering the University of Tennessee and SEC. The Rock

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opportunity to work as Texas' featured running back in the Longhorns' opener against Louisiana-Monroe. McGee should be able to play on most downs when the Longhorns' starting team is in the game. How will he hold up -- particularly considering he's had double-figure carries in only five games in his career and never rushed for more than 80 yards in any game? The opportunity to claim the role is there against a Louisiana-Monroe team that ranked 109th nationally against the run.

**6. Colorado's starting quarterback:** Will Dan Hawkins opt for a quiet dinner table at home by starting backup [Tyler Hansen](#) or stick with his family ties by giving his son Cody the nod in the Buffaloes' Sunday night opener against Colorado State? Both should play, although the Colorado coach remains adamant he's not making the call until shortly before kickoff Sunday night.

**7. Bill Snyder's emotional return to the sideline:** Is the Kansas State coach bigger than his program? Snyder will travel to the stadium Saturday on a highway named in his honor before arriving at a stadium named for him and his family as he ends a three-year sabbatical to return to coaching Saturday night against Massachusetts. The moment should be even more poignant for him and the program as the largest athletic reunion in the school's history will coincide with the game.

**8. Nebraska's new-look offense:** Bo Pelini starts his second season with the Cornhuskers facing a massive turnover as he looks for a new quarterback, two new wide receivers and help in his running game. The Cornhuskers must try to build on last season's 9-4 record with new quarterback [Zac Lee](#), new featured receivers and a heavy reliance on Roy Helu Jr. after Quentin Castille's dismissal late in training camp. Nebraska players say that Lee will provide more of a vertical passing game than was featured last year with Joe Ganz. He shouldn't face much of a challenge against a Florida Atlantic University team that ranked 81st or lower in every major team statistic, tied for 112th in sacks and returns only three defensive starters.

**9. Will Kansas show much mercy against outmanned Northern Colorado?** The Bears come into Lawrence coached by former Nebraska assistant Scott Downing. It will be interesting to see how much that association causes Mark Mangino to step off the accelerator if the Jayhawks jump ahead early against an opponent that was 1-10 last season and ranked among the bottom 20 FCS teams in pass defense and pass efficiency defense. I'm looking for extended target practice for [Todd Reesing](#), [Dezmon Briscoe](#), [Kerry Meier](#) and the rest of the Jayhawks' talented pass-and-catch combo against the outclassed Bears.

**10. The tackling of Iowa State's defense:** The Cyclones have had a total makeover defensively by new coach Paul Rhoads and defensive coordinator Wally Burnham, who have been critical of the Cyclones' tackling techniques they inherited from the staff of former coach Gene Chizik. Rhoads even admitted that the lack of technique "frustrated" him. Iowa State shouldn't face too many challenges tonight against South Dakota State, although the Bison have won three of their last five games against FBS teams. Rhoads and his new program can't afford such a slow start.

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- [Graham Watson](#)
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## Ranking the Big 12's defenses

September 2, 2009 6:34 PM

*Posted by ESPN.com's Tim Griffin*

Big 12 defenses are nearly as proficient as their offensive counterparts. But the best teams in terms of defense will likely end up as the conference's best teams because stopping the high-powered offenses in the conference is so rare.

Here's a look at how I rank them:

**1. Oklahoma:** The Sooners return nine starters and are among the nation's very best defenses. It starts with three-deep talent along the defensive line keyed by Gerald McCoy and Auston English, who was the conference's preseason player of the year last season before spraining his knee. They might be a little lacking in depth at middle linebacker behind Ryan Reynolds with the injury to freshman standout Tom Wort and Mike Balogun's iffy status. The only new starters are strong safety Sam Proctor and free safety Quinton Carter, who have both been impressive in fall camp. The Sooners' substitutes might be better collectively than most Big 12 units.

**2. Texas:** The Longhorns have arguably the conference's best back seven, particularly a developing secondary led by Earl Thomas and corners Chykie Brown and Aaron Williams. Sergio Kindle and Alex Okafor are poised to become the primary pass-rushing specialists. Lamarr Houston has developed into an anchor at defensive tackle, but the Longhorns need to find another player at the other defensive tackle position to juice production for their biggest defensive weakness. Will Muschamp's unit must do a better job after producing only 16 turnovers last season to rank tied for 104th nationally.

**3. Nebraska:** It all starts with the defensive line, which is among the best in the nation with Outland Candidate Ndamukong Suh and defensive ends Pierre Allen and Barry Turner. The Cornhuskers are young at linebacker where they might start two linebackers, although coaches really like 6-foot-6, 230-pound buck linebacker Sean Fisher and Will Compton. Coaches say the secondary is playing with more confidence, but the group produced only 12 interceptions last season. Boosting that turnover production will be critical in the Cornhuskers' division title hopes.

**4. Texas Tech:** This is where the big drop-off starts from the top three teams. The Red Raiders will miss pass-rushing threats McKinner Dixon and Brandon Williams from last season, but have an experienced unit back. Rajon Henley and Brandon Sharpe are set to fill in as the pass-rushing threats and Colby Whitlock can be a terror at times -- particularly against Texas. Brian Duncan is a producer and the team's leading tackler at middle linebacker. Jamar Wall is one of the better cover corners in the league. But the unit will depend on the improvement of two projected starters: redshirt freshman free safety Cody Davis and strong safety Franklin Mitchem.

**5. Oklahoma State:** The development by veteran defensive coordinator Bill Young

### • Tim Griffin



Tim Griffin joined ESPN.com in February

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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will determine whether this unit has the goods to lead the Cowboys to their first South title and a potential maiden BCS bowl appearance. The biggest key will be producing more sacks from a defensive front that notched only 15 last season. Young has been concentrating on push from his defensive tackles and thinks he has an underrated pair in seniors Swanson Miller and Derek Burton. The loss of Orie Lemon at middle linebacker will hurt, although Donald Booker has been a producer in limited playing time. The secondary will be playing new starters with only Perrish Cox returning. But keep an eye out for senior free safety Lucien "The Punisher" Antoine who was turning heads last season before blowing out his ACL in the second game last season.

**6. Colorado:** The Buffaloes are faster this season and that should help them cope with the high-powered offenses in the Big 12. The linebackers are deep with Shaun Mohler and Jeff Smart as the prime producers. And I really like the secondary, with Jimmy Smith and Cha'pelle Brown among the best pair of cornerbacks in the conference. The biggest concern is along the defensive line, particularly after the injury of heralded freshman Nick Kasa that may idle him for the season. One area to note will be at right defensive end, where sophomore Lagrone Shields and freshman Forrest West are in the two-deep. Shields has played four snaps in his career.

**7. Kansas:** The Jayhawks need defensive improvement if they are going to fulfill their hopes of making their first championship game. The Jayhawks were crippled last season without a consistent pass rush. They hope junior-college transfer Quintin Woods, Caleb Blakesley and 304-pound Jamal Greene up front along with sack leader Jake Laptad. After losing three starting linebackers from last season, the Jayhawks will retool. I look for them to play two linebackers and a nickel look in many cases. Look for freshman Hulton Sharp to become a producer at linebacker. The secondary is the strength of the defense with All-Big 12 candidate Darrell Stuckey at strong safety and Phillip Strozier poised to continue his late-season development.

**8. Baylor:** Up the middle, the Bears might be among the strongest defenses in the conference with heralded transfer defensive tackle Phil Taylor, linebacker Joe Pawelek and hard-hitting safety Jordan Lake. Baylor coordinator Brian Norwood knows he needs more production from a defensive line that collected only 21 sacks and allowed opponents to complete 67 percent of passes for 3,063 yards. Antonio Jones and Antonio Johnson sometimes get overshadowed by Pawelek at linebacker. Junior cornerbacks Tim Atchison, Clifton Odom and Antareis Bryan need to improve or it could be a long season for the secondary.

**9. Missouri:** Any defense that starts with All-American candidate Sean Weatherspoon won't be too bad. The Tigers could be a surprise considering that Gary Pinkel has been raving about the speed his unit possesses -- particularly at defensive end and at cornerback. Look for a three-man rotation at defensive end with Brian Coulter, Jacques Smith and Aldon Smith to boost production in the pass rush. The secondary was a huge liability last season ranking 118th in pass defense. Kevin Rutland has shown a physical style at cornerback and Kenji Jackson and Hardy Ricks might be ready to help at safety.

**10. Kansas State:** New coordinators Chris Cosh and Vic Koenning plan to run a 4-2-5 defense. Their first concern is developing a rush with 2008 first-team freshman All-America pick Brandon Harold out with an injury. While he's gone, the Wildcats need Eric Childs and Jeffrey Fitzgerald to emerge up front. John Houlik and Alex Hrebec apparently have earned the starting jobs at linebacker. Three junior college players -- David Garrett, Troy Butler and Emmanuel Lamur -- have apparently earned starting jobs for a secondary that desperately needs to improve after ranking 106th nationally in pass defense. The defense ranked tied for 110th in scoring defense and 117th in total defense, so the new coordinators better boost improvement or it will be another long season.

**11. Texas A&M:** Whatever happened to the Wrecking Crew defenses from the past? The best indication of the concern that Mike Sherman has for his defensive unit came when he transferred projected starting left tackle Lucas Patterson move back to defensive tackle late in preseason practice to boost production inside. Von Miller was impressive at the "jack" position, but he'll need some good fortune to hold up consistently rushing against the huge offensive lines in the conference. The Aggies need to improve after yielding 461 yards and 37 points per game and earning the ignominy of being one of three FBS teams to allow opponents to average 200 yards rushing and passing last season. Coaches say the unit is faster and more athletic, but



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## Ground game biggest key to CU's success Sunday

By [Kyle Clark](#) on September 3, 2009 · [Comment](#) · [Email This](#) · [ShareThis](#)



Ralphie, the Colorado Buffaloes' mascot, rumbles across Folsom Field. In a similar fashion, CU needs to pound the ball on the ground against CSU on Sunday night.

BOULDER – The Colorado Buffaloes were all smiles Tuesday. Even after a practice 50 percent longer than usual, everyone came off the field grinning. It wasn't just that oh-so-pretty collection of female training staff joking with the squad and serving up protein shakes, or the fact that this was the last day of practicing in pads. Game week has finally arrived, and the rivalry is coming to town.

Although Colorado State will travel here as clear underdogs Sunday night, this series often has the best games (and sometimes upsets) from those where the disparity on paper is great. CU will need to avoid the temptation of looking ahead to Toledo, only five days later. Along with that focus, here are the keys to victory for the Buffs:

### **RUN, RUN, RUN . . . THEN RUN SOME MORE**

Most defenses usually have to prepare for one featured running back, and sometimes an excellent third-down or situational backup. Colorado State has to be ready for four ballcarriers, each with a unique skill set.

Demetrius Sumler has a balanced mix of speed and power, and is also the most experienced runner in the group. Look for him to begin the charge.

Rodney Stewart, at only 5 feet, 6 inches, has amazing quickness and agility. His slashing style is reminiscent of another back the same height, San Diego Charger Darren Sproles.



Darrell Scott is 100 percent and ready to answer for last year, which was hampered by nagging injuries. "He's just so much more confident and comfortable with what he's doing and knowing, and he's in so much better shape, all that stuff," said Buffs Head Coach Dan Hawkins regarding Scott's improvement in the past 12 months.

Brian Lockridge is probably the most talented all-around player, if not the most talked about this camp by coaches and assistants. He brings the strongest receiving threat to the backfield.

With all this skill, the Buffaloes need to play keep away. This should be classic power football, wearing out the front seven by keeping it up the middle play after play, and getting those safeties tired of running up to the line.

This style of play should help negate Colorado State's biggest defensive asset, Mychal Sisson. Touted by many as the model for the new style of linebacker, Sisson is built to defend against the spread offense. Built for speed instead of size, he may have trouble getting through CU's large offensive line.

### **BLITZ EARLY AND OFTEN**

It's been more than a week since the Rams named senior QB Grant Stucker their starter, but that doesn't figure to be a competitive advantage in Hawkins' eyes.

"We don't really know that much about him either way," Hawkins said, "so you just kind of have to adjust. I'm sure there will be a little cat-and-mouse adjustment on both sides of the ball, you know, when we get going."

Starting his first game since high school in 2004, Stucker may be familiar with the offense, but he's still green. Rubbing his face in the dirt early should rattle him, and bringing in unfamiliar base packages along with DB blitzes will keep it that way. Otherwise, the secondary could have major problems with CSU's fast receiving corps along the edges.

A defensive line full of second-year men might seem daunting against the seniors on the other side of the ball, but there is a good amount of experience and confidence going in. Tackle Eugene Goree said, "We've been together, we've got chemistry going, so I feel comfortable with the D-line."

### **KEEP THE STARTER COMFORTABLE**

Call it gamesmanship, stubbornness, starter three-card-monte or whatever you please. The fact remains that Hawkins won't release the identity of his fist-string quarterback till Sunday.

Given the close competition this year, whoever it is will have detractors in the stands. Combine that with the first-game-of-the-season atmosphere, a big rivalry and the pre-game "warmup" Boulder students are known for, and you get a powder keg come kickoff. If the first two drives end up short, or the ball is turned over, the wrath of thousands could turn against their own before the first half is out.

Hawkins historically hasn't been a fan of playing a two-quarterback offense, but with the last CU-CSU game at Folsom Field until at least 2020 on the line and the back-and-forth nature of last year's game, he might be tempted to bend to the crowd.

Don't fall into this trap; keeping it on the ground will keep the Buffs' passer off his back and eventually open up the pass. When this happens, don't rush to throw the long ball first – a bubble screen here could be the best way to showcase the speed of new WR Andre Simmons.

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## Buffaloes' Espinoza overcomes barriers

*By Patrick Ridgell and Justin Williams*  
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BOULDER — The Colorado Buffaloes have yet to play a game in 2009, but Jason Espinoza might have already cleared one big barrier.

At a recent practice, one of Espinoza's teammates hit the 5-foot-8, 175-pound walk-on receiver from Alamosa square on Espinoza's collarbone. The same collarbone he broke twice in 2008. The same collarbone on which surgeons placed a plate and screws in an effort to ensure Espinoza doesn't break it a third time.

It was the first time Espinoza had taken a direct hit on that part of his body. His reaction?

"It felt real solid," Espinoza said. "It felt kind of weird; it crushed on my skin because I have a metal plate. But it's solid, so I'm not even worried about it all right now."

Espinoza is expected to be CU's first punt returner Sunday when the Buffs open 2009 at home against Colorado State (5 p.m., FSN). He won the job in August 2008 before injuries sidetracked him.

He's also listed second on the depth chart at wide receiver — CU lists all of its receivers together — so he's expected to play a key role in the offense, as well.

"I'm not going to be happy until I start making plays," Espinoza said. "I worked for it, but I need to prove it to myself first."

If there was a mental barrier for him to cross after suffering the same injury twice in one year, coach Dan Hawkins hopes the hit on the collarbone he took in practice helped him do so.

"The poor guy got it twice last year," Hawkins said.

"He's done a nice job. He's a very detail-oriented kid. He's smart, he's a hard worker, he has good mitts. He runs good routes. He's done a nice job."

Espinoza believes he's in better shape now than a year ago. Last spring, he was the wide receivers' Iron Buffalo Award winner, which goes to the player at each position that represents hard work, dedication and toughness, and who lifted the most total pounds in the weight room.

He believes he's quicker, too, and added he never gets tired during practices.

But what might prove most important is he's comfortable.

"I know every single play," Espinoza said. "I can go through them all. I know what all the positions are doing. Last year, I was trying to come in and learn the plays during the game. But once you learn the concepts, you learn what the other receivers are doing, and it's a lot easier."

**LONG WAIT:** Sophomore right defensive end Lagrone Shields is another Buff whose playing time has been sparse, but he is expected to start Sunday.

Shields won the job in camp even though he can count the number of real collegiate plays in which he's participated on one hand: four. They came last year in games against Colorado State and Texas.

Winning the job does not mean Shields has accomplished anything. That's according to him.

"I most definitely have to keep proving myself," Shields said.

Said senior linebacker Marcus Burton: "He's one of those players that didn't make mistakes. He learned his role. From a coach's standpoint, he showed them why they can trust him."

Shields, like some of CU's other defensive linemen, was buried on the bench last year while George Hypolite, Brandon Nicolas and Maurice Lucas took almost all of the snaps. He said he found motivation watching those three play while he sat.

"Those guys were experienced and they were good," Shields said. "So my motivation was I wanted to be like that. I want to start for three years. I saw them and there was a reason why there were out there."

**INJURY NEWS:** CU issued an injury report Wednesday.

Offensive lineman David Clark (knee) is doubtful for Sunday. Offensive lineman Matt Bahr (ankle) and linebacker Michael Sipili (sprained right MCL) are listed as questionable. Running back Rodney Stewart (hamstring) is probable.

Defensive end Nick Kasa (partially torn MCL) is listed as out for 5-to-7 weeks. CU has not announced whether he'll have surgery.

Guard Max Tuioti-Mariner said Wednesday his plan is still to try to get ready for the Big 12 opener, Oct. 10 at Texas. He said he could still redshirt in 2009, giving him a year to recover from the torn ACLs he suffered last September and March, but he'd prefer not to.

"I really want to play," Tuioti-Mariner said. "I miss hitting."

Tuioti-Mariner said he weighs 290 pounds. He started twice at guard last year as a true freshman before a torn ACL ended his season.

**DAVIS LEAVES:** Kicker Jameson Davis informed the program Monday he is ending his football career.

Davis cited problems recovering from microfracture surgery on his left knee, his plant knee, which he had in January. He was unable to compete with Aric Goodman for the placekicking job in camp. He had injections during August to help provide better "lubrication" inside the knee, where loose cartilage still floats.

Davis handled 46 kickoffs for CU in 2008. Fifteen were touchbacks. He went 1-for-3 on field goals after Goodman temporarily lost the starting spot last season.

Goodman enters 2009 as CU's placekicker. He continues to excel in practice. He went 5-for-14 on field goals in 2008.

**EXTRA POINTS:** CU reported that recruit Josh Moten, who signed with CU in February, did not qualify for the university and must attend a junior college before he can enroll. ... Former CU linebacker Sean Tufts (2000-2003) will become the second former player to be a Ralphie Handler on Sunday. Former guard Chad Hammond was the first in 1996. Tufts is in CU's MBA program.

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