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## Bufs QB Hirschman ready for call

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — No matter what the calendar shows, Colorado freshman quarterback Nick Hirschman said Wednesday he will have no regrets about burning his redshirt if forced into action Saturday night at No. 11 Oklahoma or in a subsequent game.

Giving up a redshirt with the season about two-thirds completed isn't in anybody's plans. And in a best-case scenario, CU coaches hope to preserve Hirschman's redshirt. But if starter Cody Hawkins has to go out for more than a play or two, the 6-foot-3, 225-pound Hirschman will get the call.

That's fine with him.

"It's hard for me to say 'no' to play. I don't think I could do it," Hirschman said after practice. "The coaches are doing what's best for the team (in getting him game-ready), and I support their decision 100 percent."

CU isn't left with many other options. The starter for the first seven games, Tyler Han-sen (ruptured spleen), has been ruled out for the rest of the regular season and no scholarship quarterbacks are listed on the roster behind Hawkins and Hirschman. A walk-on freshman, Justin Gorman (6-0, 200), will make the trip to Oklahoma in case an emergency quarterback is needed.

Hirschman, from Los Gatos, Calif., said it would be "awesome" to make his college debut in Oklahoma's legendary stadium in front of 82,000-plus fans if that happens.

"It's been a dream of mine to play in a (college) game," he said. "If I go in, that would mean Cody is hurt, which isn't a good thing. But it still would be real exciting to go into a game."

Hirschman said he is taking about 15 to 20 snaps in practice this week with the first team. Before that, he had been on the scout team, imitating the quarterback of the upcoming opponent each week. Hirschman graduated early from high school and enrolled at CU in January and participated in spring drills.

### Webb to get opportunities.

A star of August scrimmages, redshirt-freshman linebacker Derrick Webb has been relegated to mostly special-teams work but that should change this weekend.

Webb (6-0, 220 pounds) from Memphis, Tenn., is one of the team's big hitters and has moved up



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the depth chart. He is expected to be in a rotation with junior Patrick Mahnke at the "will" (inside) linebacker spot, where they will fill in for Jon Major (knee).

"He's coming along," CU coach Dan Hawkins said of Webb, adding, "He's very disruptive."

## Footnotes.

Sophomore offensive tackle Bryce Givens (ankle) said he won't play against Oklahoma but should be ready next week. . . . Dan Hawkins said the mood and focus of the team is encouraging. "I thought they operated really good today," he said.

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## Webb's sights set on starting

*By Brian Howell*  
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BOULDER — Moving to what he calls “Cold Colorado” took some getting used to for Derrick Webb.

However, the University of Colorado redshirt freshman is getting comfortable not only in Boulder these days, but also with the football team.

“It’s cold and it’s football season,” the Memphis native said. “I’ve been here for a year so I’m getting used to it.”

With starting inside linebacker Jon Major going down with a knee injury, Webb figures to see his role increase dramatically on Saturday when the Buffs (3-4, 0-3 in the Big 12) visit Oklahoma (6-1, 2-1).



Linebacker Derrick Webb is hoping to get his first career start on Saturday for Colorado. **Joshua Buck/Times-Call**

“We have different packages going in and I’ll be starting in at least most of them,” said Webb, who could split time with Liloa Nobriga and Patrick Mahnke.

Up to this point, D-Webb is probably best known for the “Colorado Swag” rap he wrote. The rap is played during pregame warm-ups at Folsom Field and is on YouTube.

He’d like his greatest hits to come on the field, though. The 6-foot, 220-pounder is a big hitter who, in just 10 defensive plays, has already made four tackles.

In last week’s loss to Texas Tech, he had three tackles and half a sack in eight plays.

“I’m very excited after last week,” he said. “I got pretty much my first taste at defense and got my first few plays. It just made me want more. It just so happened that an opportunity presented itself and I’m ready for it.”

The coaches are eager to see if he is, indeed, ready for it. So far, he’s impressed them.

“If you had to pick out two or three of the better hitters on the team, he’d probably be one of them,” CU head coach Dan Hawkins said. “He brings a certain sort of physicalness to the deal.

“He’s coming along. He’s probably right where he should be — backing up somebody that has a little bit more experience until he captures some of the nuances. But, he’s very disruptive. When he makes up his mind and goes, he’s very disruptive.”

He proved that last week, as well as throughout the year on special teams. His 13 special teams tackles rank second on the team.

Webb’s success on special teams is sure to help him going forward.

"No question," CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "Any time you're on the field, that gives you a little more confidence being on the field."

"He still is a very young, inexperienced player, but he plays with a lot of passion. That's his strength. I like his progress."

Webb likes his progress, too. And, he's got something to shoot for. Last week, freshman Terrel Smith made 15 tackles in his first college start, so the bar has been set.

"I'll shoot for 20," he joked. "We'll see where it falls."

READY, IF NEEDED: With starter Tyler Hansen now out for the year with a ruptured spleen, true freshman Nick Hirschman is now No. 2 on the depth chart at quarterback, behind Cody Hawkins.

"This week is a little bit different," he said. "It's pretty exciting at the same time as a little bit nerve-racking. I've been preparing well this week; Cody has been helping me a lot and I'm ready to go in if I need to."

If the Buffs did ask him to burn his redshirt year, Hirschman said, "It would be so hard for me to say no to playing time. I don't think I could do it. The coaching staff is looking out for the best interests of the team and whatever the team needs me to do I'm going to do."

Hirschman is a little different from some true freshmen in that he arrived on campus in the spring, instead of summer.

"I think he's probably a lot more calmed down, and in terms of knowing what we do, he's got a pretty good grasp on that now," Dan Hawkins said. "You get in the game and things move a lot faster, but for a guy that's a true freshman, he probably has as much knowledge and experience as you could expect."

Of course, at this point Hirschman said he hopes to keep his redshirt because that would mean Cody Hawkins stays healthy.

"Yeah, that's a great thing," he said.

EXTRA POINTS: This week will be the eighth straight CU-OU meeting in which Oklahoma has been ranked in the Top 20. The Sooners are 11th in the Associated Press poll this week. CU has not been ranked for the last five meetings. ... CU has never gone to Norman, Okla., as an unranked team and defeated a ranked Sooners squad.

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# CU Buff Nate Solder up for 'academic Heisman'

## Offensive lineman could be finalist for academic honor

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

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Scouts from the National Football League keep pestering Colorado offensive line coach Denver Johnson for criticism of senior left tackle Nate Solder.

Sure, Johnson has minor technique tweaks he asks of Solder from time to time, but he keeps disappointing those scouts who have a hard time believing the young man is everything he appears to be.

Johnson might have even more positive information to add to Solder's already brimming resume on Thursday when the National Football Foundation announces its 16 finalists for the William V. Campbell Trophy, also known as the academic Heisman.

The NFF presents the award annually to college football's top scholar-athlete. It is the most prestigious academic award in college football. Players at all levels of NCAA football are eligible for the honor and Solder was named one of 121 semifinalist last month.

All 16 finalists receive an \$18,000 postgraduate scholarship and a trip to the foundation's annual awards dinner. The winner receives a \$25,000 post-graduate scholarship. Last year's winner was former Florida quarterback and current Denver Broncos backup Tim Tebow. The award was created in 1990 and former Buff Jim Hansen was the third player to earn it in 1992.

It wouldn't surprise Johnson or CU head coach Dan Hawkins if Solder's name was among the final 16 today.

"He's having a spectacular season," Johnson said. "He really was a talented guy and he's just continued to grow and blossom and develop as an offensive lineman. He's very conscientious about trying to be a technically sound guy and couple that with just great God-given ability and he's got tremendous work ethic.

"Unfortunately, we're not having the kind of season as a team that we had hoped for, but Nate individually is having an outstanding season. Fortunately, it's not going to be his last season either. He's got a future ahead of him."

While it might not surprise his coaches, it would definitely be an eye-opener for Solder if he was named a finalist today. He didn't even know he was in consideration for the honor until he was told by the Camera after Wednesday's practice.

"They keep me in the dark," Solder joked. "You would think they'd tell me."

Solder, who was recruited to CU by former tight ends coach John Wristen, is a gifted athlete with unusual size (6-foot-9, 315 pounds), speed, athleticism and intelligence all in one package.

He was named to the Playboy Preseason All-America team during the summer and was a first-team member of the Big 12 all conference football team and all conference academic teams last year. Solder already graduated from CU with a degree in biology.

"First of all, I came here to get a degree before coming here to play football," Solder said. "I came here to get a degree and I thought football was just a means to get that degree. I've always put academics as the highest priority on my list. That is kind of always the way I've approached it. I've tried to put as much or more energy into my academics."

Solder has played 515 snaps this year for the Buffs. Junior Ryan Miller is the only other offensive lineman to log as much playing time, but none of Solder's teammates come close to his level of play.

Solder leads the team with 79 total knockdown blocks, an average of more than 10 per game. The next closest Buff is

Miller, who has 34 knockdown blocks.

He had a difficult day on Sept. 11 at Cal when he struggled to block a speedy outside linebacker and allowed two sacks, but Hawkins said an issue that had nothing to do with Solder led to those struggles. That issue is believed to be Cal noticing a tendency with the Colorado snap count.

"I'm doing OK," Solder said when asked to assess his season. "There is always things I want to clean up. I'm just one of those people who is just never good enough and I just always want to get better. I've done OK. There are things I can do a lot better."

That attitude from Solder is part of what Johnson enjoys about coaching him, it's also part of the scouting report he presents to those scouts.

A majority of NFL teams have been through Boulder and have inquired about the tackle.

"He's just a coach's dream," Johnson said. "He's a very humble guy. He's a very conservative guy. He's not a real demonstrative guy sometimes, but he is very studious. He goes about this the same way he goes about his academics. He takes notes in meetings. He watches film and asks very intelligent and insightful questions. He's just the kind of guy who thrives on learning, out here just like in the classroom. ... He's just a joy to coach."

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"It's pretty amazing to watch him talk in the game plans and the absolute complete mastery of the playbook he has," he said.

Hirschman said he has prepared every week as if he might play. He has been in uniform on the sideline for each game and helps signal in the plays from offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau. He spent last week before the Texas Tech game working on the scout team. This week he said he is receiving 15 to 20 reps during practices.

### **Trio will replace Major**

Junior Patrick Mahnke will likely start and see much of the playing time at Will linebacker this week in place of injured starter Jon Major, who is out indefinitely with a torn medial collateral ligament in his left knee.

But coaches said redshirt freshmen Derrick Webb and Liloa Nobriga are also likely to get playing time at the position against the Sooners.

Nobriga has played in four games on defense and has made 11 tackles. Webb has played in two games defensively with four tackles. Webb is the second leading points earner on the team in special teams.

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