



*Ryan Dannewitz is the O-line's only senior and the key to where everyone else fits.*  
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



## Brooks: O-line Hopes To Help Buffs Find Their Legs

Release: 08/07/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

*(Note: First in a series previewing the Buffs position-by-position during training camp. Today: Offensive line.)*

**BOULDER** - Steve Marshall remembers how it was back in the day - more precisely those Saturdays when the Colorado football team had a dependable, oft-times prolific, running game and flaunted it.

The 2001 season comes immediately to mind for Marshall, who coached CU's offensive line that year and returned to Boulder two winters ago with the same job description.

To review, the '01 Buffaloes averaged 228.5 rushing yards a game (434.4 in total offense) en route to winning the school's only Big 12 Conference championship. Marshall's O-line included Andre Gurode, Wayne Lucier and Victor Rogers, and running behind them were Chris Brown (78.8 yards a game) and Bobby Purify (76.3). Between them, they accounted for 21

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O-line Preview

rushing touchdowns, Brown grinding out 16 of the TDs.

Not a bad overall cast of characters, but times have changed . . .

Since '01, CU has averaged over 200 ground yards only once (241.2 in '02) and has been at 150 or below every season since 2007. The last three seasons saw the Buffs average 111.2, including 108.7 last fall. That's clearly a number Marshall and the man who brought him back to Boulder - Jon Embree - aren't comfortable with.

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"Our ability to run, our commitment to run, will be better," Marshall contended. "I don't know if we were not committed to running it last year, but in some games when you get behind by three scores you can't play balanced football. We have to have balance, but I think our commitment (to run) continued to grow. It's like anything else: you've got to learn it."

Added guard/tackle Ryan Dannewitz, the only senior among Marshall's group: "With the new offense we were running last year and the new schemes, it was somewhat difficult to

get going right away. That's what we really need to do - establish ourselves as a run-first team so we can open up the field for our skill guys."

Having a dependable, productive running game, said Marshall, "doesn't mean we go out and rush for 300 every week, but if we get the games to the fourth quarter then we have to run to win. That never changes regardless of what style of offense you run. There's a lot of speed in the (Pac-12) and a lot of guys who can score a lot of points in a hurry. We also have to be flexible enough to throw it and screen it and do all the things you need to do as coach (Hank) Stram said back in the day to 'matriculate the ball down the field.'"

If they "matriculate" it downfield successfully this season and do what Embree & Co. hope to do on the ground, the Buffs will do it with only one senior among Marshall's first 10 players. The versatile and determined Dannewitz figures as the training camp key in Marshall establishing his starting lineup and depth.

After right tackle Jack Harris went down early last season with a broken leg and David Bakhtiari suffered a knee injury, Dannewitz, a 6-6, 300-pounder, ultimately stepped in and started 11 games. And he did it with a chronic back problem that never let up and even kept him out of spring drills.

Said Marshall: "We'd have been in big trouble if we didn't have that kid last year. He's a tough guy but his back needs constant care. We'll go baby steps with him in camp, see where he is and try to get him through to January."

Dannewitz believes that won't be a problem. He said his back "has been much better throughout the summer and I've done progressively more and more . . . I've had a lot of rehab and am feeling good. We'll see what the first week of camp has in store for me; I'm ready to go."

Harris is healed, cleared and coming off of a productive spring and summer with no complications from his leg. "He's ready to roll," Marshall said. "He just has to stay on the field . . . it's his time."

Still, Dannewitz - back willing - will take snaps at both tackle and guard on both sides. If Dannewitz's health remains a factor, Marshall could start three juniors - Bakhtiari at left tackle, Harris at right tackle, Gus Handler at center - and two sophomores - left guard Alexander Lewis, right guard Daniel Munyer.

But where Dannewitz fits is the puzzle's key component. "Right now, I have a lot to look forward to at both

positions," he said.

Marshall's backups at all positions could be either redshirt freshmen or the only incoming true freshman Jeromy Irwin, who will get his first look at left guard behind Lewis. (Freshman Gerrard Kough is scheduled to grayshirt, enrolling in January.)

Dannewitz said he's tried to "take a lot of the young guys under my wing because they're really going to really play important roles in our line." He also believes this group of underclassmen "is actually more ready than other young guys in the past have been at the beginning of camp. I'm really impressed with how the young guys have come along this summer and learned things . . . really, our player-run practices have gone extraordinarily well. I really think we're going to start off this camp really well. We have good things to look forward to."

Marshall called Bakhtiari "our best football player, and he was last year, too . . . just a heckuva player." But the mixing and matching to identify his five best players could include Bakhtiari moving inside to guard and Lewis shifting outside to tackle, where he played last season as a freshman. Munyer can play guard and center and if he continues to develop might make an NFL roster at center, Marshall said.

Lewis opened at left tackle against Colorado State last season, but Marshall now says "he wasn't ready for prime time then - and he'll be the first to admit it. That's where 'Danno' came in. (Lewis) did some good service as a tight end and played some tackle. He's a really good prospect and will be a good player before he's done here. He can reach and run; you're looking to get the five best athletes on the field and he's one of them."

Marshall is hopeful that Lewis won't have to be drafted into the occasional tight end role this season. "We signed three (tight ends) so we'll see how it transpires," Marshall said. "I don't think we can afford to do that this year; (Lewis) will be on the field a lot in some capacity in the offensive line."

Handler, said Marshall, "has just kind of come out of nowhere" at center and along with Bakhtiari and Harris form the O-line leaders. "They've kind of taken over the old-man-of-the-group roles," Marshall said. "They're guys we have to count on to play extremely well and I think they will."

In a word, Marshall's backups will be green. Converted defensive lineman Stephane Nembot is "a long way away, but he's got a great will to be successful," Marshall said. "What he knows he knows well. This camp is huge for him."

Ditto for Marc Mustoe, who has put on 10 to 15 pounds of muscle and is "a smart guy," Marshall said, noting he needs to be able to count on him, as well as Kaiwi Crabb, Brad Cotner and Alex Kelley.

As a whole, the Buffs should benefit from their first year in Embree's system. But Marshall warns against forgetting fundamentals that were taught last season and pushing too far, too fast: "The thing we have to be cognizant of as a coaching staff is, in my opinion, even though it's year two and (players') knowledge is better, we've still got to go back and do basics and play basic football, hold on to the ball, block, tackle and leverage . . . get off on the snap count, do all those things. Just because the kids have gone through a year we still have to do what we do and do it better."

"But the second year, there are some things (that should be understood more). The one thing that I have a very strong feeling of now after a year - a fall and a spring - with these guys is I know what they can do and what they can't do a hell of a lot better. I know if something breaks down I have a better idea of how we can fix it from a personnel standpoint."

One easily forgotten factor in CU's 2001 success, said Marshall, is that his O-line stayed relatively healthy all season. That didn't happen last season for the Buffs, although the 2011 overall talent was nowhere near comparable to the '01 group.

"A lot of guys got hurt last year and we were doing a lot of things trying to find something (that worked)," Marshall said. "This year we've got to line up, decide what to do and how and then go man go. Let the chips fall

where they may. That's the difference in a second year, but we've got to do it right."

## THE INSIDE LOOK AT ...

### Offensive line

**Coach:** Steve Marshall, second stint on CU staff, second season under Jon Embree.

**Returning starters:** LT David Bakhtiari, Jr.; C Gus Handler, Jr.; RT Ryan Dannewitz, Sr.

**Returnees:** C Daniel Munyer, Soph.; LG Kaiwi Crabb, Soph.; RT Jack Harris, Jr.; LT Alexander Lewis, Soph.; T Stephane Nembot, FR-RS; C Brad Cotner, Soph.; LT Marc Mustoe, FR-RS; G Alex Kelley, Fr.

**Newcomers:** T/G Jeremy Irwin, Fr. (Freshman T/G Gerrad Kough is scheduled to grayshirt, or enroll in January).

**Key losses:** LG Ryan Miller, RG Ethan Adkins, LG Blake Behrens, RG Sione Tau, RG David Clark, LG Paulay Asiata (left program).

**Stat line:** The Buffs didn't run the ball particularly well (108.7 yards a game, No. 106 nationally) in 2011.

**Bottom line:** Two veteran starters at guard (Miller, Adkins) must be replaced, but returning players should be more familiar this season with run schemes and what position coach Steve Marshall and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy want up front. The health and durability of Dannewitz (back) is the early key to how the line takes shape. Marshall also wants his younger players like Nembot, Mustoe, Cotner, Crabb and Kelley to develop quickly for depth purposes. But this could be a very underrated O-line.

*Next: Linebackers*

**THREE PLAYERS DISCIPLINED:** One CU football player has been dismissed from the team and two others suspended for two games each in the wake of an incident last weekend in Boulder. Police were called early Saturday morning after witnesses saw a passenger in one of two cars containing eight CU players brandishing what appeared to be a real pistol. It turned out to be a pellet gun and no charges were filed or arrests made.

Embree said he was informed of the incident by the players involved. After reviewing it with them, their parents and Boulder police, he has suspended junior tight end DaVaughn Thornton and freshman receiver Jeffery Thomas for the first two games and dismissed redshirt freshman linebacker Jermaine Clark from the team. Embree added that Clark had had "some previous issues" as well as "some personal issues back home" in Winston-Salem, N.C.

After practice Tuesday afternoon, Embree told the team he would address the incident at a team meeting that night. "It was three guys making poor decisions; they've all been talked to and their parents have been talked to. They all know what's happening," he told the media later. He said he would reemphasize to his players "how we behave and what needs to be done" and said the Boulder police "were great; they let us know what was going on . . . I know no charges were filed, but at the end of the day we don't behave that way. There's no gray area when you behave like those guys behaved."

Embree said the majority of his players "have tried to be the model citizens we want and can be proud of." He also said he empathized with law enforcement officers who were edgy about emergency calls associated with firearms: "I take this seriously; I understand the job they have is one that takes a special person to do that or want to do that. With all the events and things that have happened in the past, it's bad judgment . . . but we've got it handled."



The other players involved in the incident will be dealt with for violating one of the team's "in trouble after midnight" rules, Embree said, noting their punishment will consist of, among other things, after-practice running and strenuous agility work until Aug. 23.

The other players involved were sophomore defensive backs Jered Bell and Josh Moten, junior linebackers Paul Vigo and Derrick Webb, and sophomore receiver Keenan Canty. Embree said those players were in the two cars after getting rides home.

**CREER KEEPS ON PLUGGING:** Sophomore tailback Malcolm Creer is back and close to being full speed - an admirable feat after he suffered a knee injury at Arizona State that Embree thought might be "a career-ender." Creer, who had his redshirt pulled late (Oct. 29), saw his freshman season end that night in Tempe, Ariz.

Embree said although Creer has full clearance to participate in camp, the CU staff keeps close watch on him to make sure "he doesn't get in a bad position" if his knee gets fatigued.

"He's still very sharp mentally; he hasn't missed a beat there," Embree said. "He's done well when he's been in there . . . he's helped mentoring some of the younger backs. He could easily try to keep them in a bad situation to protect his position, so to speak, but he's confident enough in his skill and a good enough teammate that he's helped those guys."

Creer, a 5-11, 205-pounder from Los Angeles, said he felt good, but added, "I've just got to keep going . . . I'm not there yet."

**BUFF BITS:** It's extremely early in camp and full pads haven't been put on yet, but Embree still likes what he's seeing from his defense. "I like what our defense is doing; they're playing with tempo and energy," he said after Day 2 was in the books. "The young guys keep showing up and that's always a positive." . . . Thomas, the freshman receiver who suffered a slight hamstring pull on Monday, could return to practice on Friday - the first day of work in pads. Embree also said freshman defensive end Samson Kafovalu suffered what appeared to be a sprained ankle in Tuesday's work.

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## Football: CU Buffs' Nick Kasa committed to making impact at TE

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

It has been less than a year since Nick Kasa made the switch to tight end.

The Colorado senior is hoping he's got what it takes to make an impact for the Buffaloes this season, however.

"I feel I'm doing pretty darn well," said Kasa, who converted to tight end in October. "I just feel a lot more comfortable with everything, with the playbook, and that's a lot of it. I'm getting used to running routes. I ran a ton over the summer."

Tight end is one of CU's least experienced positions. Despite just three games at the position, the 6-foot-6, 260-pound Kasa is the only tight end on the team with a college catch. He made one catch for 8 yards in the season finale at Utah last year.

"I think we got a lot of work done this spring, but it's apparent he did a lot this summer," said J.D. Brookhart, who coaches the tight ends. "I see a guy with a way different comfort level. Is he there yet? Not by any means. He's got a long way to go in a lot of areas, but he's getting there. He's going to get that game experience. It'll take some time, but Nick's got a chance to be a good player."

So do a lot of other guys on the roster. In fact, CU's freshman class includes three tight ends -- Vincent Hobbs, Sean Irwin and Austin Ray.

Although it's early, Hobbs appears to be ahead of the others.

"Vincent is an ex-basketball guy who his still learning football; it's all new to him," Brookhart said. "Athletically he's a pretty good player. Vincent is pretty athletic and because of basketball he catches the ball well.

"It's so early to say (who leads); you're going to see things go up and back the whole time."

Brookhart said that Ray has good hands and "is a very, very smart guy that's going to be a big kid."

Of Irwin, he said, "We'd love to redshirt him and get him bigger and all that stuff because he's a football player."

Brookhart also added that two other veterans -- junior Scott Fernandez and sophomore Kyle Slavin -- can't be forgotten, either. He praised the improvements both have made.

It's no secret that CU head coach Jon Embree, a former Colorado and NFL tight end, likes to utilize the position. That gives Kasa hope that, even if the others are impressive, that he can make an impact this season.

"That's got to be my mentality right now, I'm a senior," he said. "I'm really excited about it. I really love playing tight end, so I'm going to do everything I can to do as well as I can this season."

Bonsu aims to please

Junior Nate Bonsu is hoping to make a good impression on CU coaches and so far he's doing that.

"Nate's doing a great job," Embree said. "He's a guy that is going into his fourth year and is eligible to graduate. I told him if he can't be a guy that's a major contributor for us, this is going to be it for him. He didn't bat an eye."

Bonsu, a 6-foot-1, 280-pound defensive tackle, missed the 2010 season with a knee injury. After a thigh injury limited him during spring ball in 2011, he played in seven games last season. However, he injured a shoulder and had postseason surgery and did not play in the spring this year.

About 30 pounds lighter, Bonsu came into fall camp ready to roll.

"He's got the shoulder stronger, he's doing a great job of showing up," Embree said. "He's getting more comfortable. You can tell it's important to him and that he wants to be a part of what we're trying to do. It's good to have him. We need him. We have some young kids obviously that are doing some good things, too, and he's raised his game to match it. I think that says a lot about him as a competitor and how important it is for him to be a Buff."

#### Defense steps up

The Buffs are not in pads yet, but Embree said the defense had a good day on Tuesday.

"The defense forced some turnovers and we were able to not only force them but scoop and score with it, so that was good," he said. "Obviously that's bad coming from the offensive standpoint, but I like what our defense is doing. I like the way they're playing with the tempo and energy. The young guys keep showing up, so that's always a positive."

The Buffs are scheduled to put pads on for the first time in Friday.

"We'll see once you can be hit, but so far it's been pretty good," Embree said.

#### Notable

Freshman receiver Jeffrey Thomas injured his hamstring on Monday. Embree said the Buffs are trying to be careful with Thomas so the injury doesn't become worse. He said Thomas might be back to practice on Friday. ... Embree has disciplined the eight players involved in Friday's air soft gun incident in Boulder. Receiver DeV Vaughn Thornton and Thomas have both been suspended for the first two games, while freshman linebacker Jermaine Clark is no longer with the team. Several reasons contributed to Clark's dismissal, however. In addition, all the involved players will be doing extra conditioning after practice throughout camp. ... Freshman defensive lineman Samson Kafovalu suffered the only reported injury on Tuesday. "I think (he) sprained his ankle," Embree said.

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## Football: CU Buffs' Malcolm Creer consummate teammate

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

When Malcolm Creer hobbled off the field on crutches at Arizona State last fall, he couldn't believe his bad luck and didn't know when he might be able to return to football.

Ten months later, the Colorado running back is back on the field having successfully recovered from a major knee injury and his teammates are calling him "Lance."

Creer agreed to take off his redshirt in late October after starting tailback Rodney Stewart was injured. He was able to play in one game and part of another before suffering sprained ACL and MCL ligaments in his knee, ending his season. Coach Jon Embree said after talking with team athletic trainers he thought there was a chance the injury would be "a career-ender" for the young running back.

Creer underwent surgery in December and began rehabilitation process soon after. He sat in Folsom Field on Memorial Day watching the Bolder Boulder and said he was optimistic about being able to play a full season in 2012. It looks like that will happen as long as his knee responds well to the rigors of fall camp.

"He's worked his tail off to get back," Embree said after the second practice of fall camp Tuesday.

During the rehab process, the father of a friend back home in California suggested Creer take up cycling or riding a stationary bike to help his recovery. The friend's father is a therapist and Creer liked the idea. He purchased a 2011 Fuji 3.0 bike that he has been riding all over Boulder County, earning him the nickname "Lance" after the cycling star Lance Armstrong.

"Cycling is pretty fun," Creer said. "All the bikers are friendly. I want to do a race. That's on my bucket list. It's become a next love after football."

Creer said he still isn't 100 percent recovered from the injury but he feels strong enough to practice and doctors have cleared him to play. He said trainers are telling him he is at a point where he has to fight through soreness and fatigue and see how the knee responds to playing football again.

Embree said Creer has looked good in the early going in camp, but coaches are taking it slow and monitoring him making sure he doesn't push too hard too fast.

There is suddenly much more competition in the Colorado backfield than there was during Creer's true freshman season a year ago. Coaches added three freshmen tailbacks and recently awarded Josh Ford a scholarship after a strong offseason.

All of those players are fighting for playing time behind Tony Jones, the clear-cut starter.

"He stayed very sharp mentally," Embree said of Creer. "He hasn't missed a beat there and he's done very well when he's been in there. The thing I love about Malcolm is he's helped mentoring some of the younger backs when he could easily try to keep them in a bad situation to protect his position so to speak, but he's confident enough in his skill and a good enough teammate that he's helped those guys."

Creer probably has an advantage over freshmen Terrence Crowder, Davien Payne and Donta Abron because he knows the offense much better and understands the nuances of the coaches' expectations. But he is at a disadvantage not being completely healthy.

"There's a lot of running backs. They're all good," Creer said. "We're all progressing each day with each other. So it's going to be a good competition during fall camp. I've just got to assert myself somewhere in there. I'm going to help my freshmen and help my upperclassmen, too."



## CU Buffs asking Chidera Uzo-Diribe to tackle bigger role this season

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The good news for Colorado junior defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe was showing potential in 2011 with 18 unassisted tackles.

The bad news: That's it. He did not assist on any other tackles. Not one.

Coaches need last year's pass-rush specialist to become more than that. According to CU, Uzo-Diribe's statistical oddity broke the school record set in 2007 by cornerback Gardner McKay with 16 solo stops and no assists.

Uzo-Diribe knows he must be versatile.

"When I got here, I wasn't really a good run defender," he said. "And playing in space is another thing I'm trying to get better at. I need to run to the ball."

Uzo-Diribe earned all-region honors for Corona (Calif.) High School in the Los Angeles area but he is still relatively new to football. He concentrated on playing basketball until his senior year.

Not having grown up with football, Uzo-Diribe is still learning the subtleties of the game.

"He's kind of figuring out the game within the game," CU senior defensive tackle Will Pericak said. "There are certain things you see in the defense that are going to change your alignment a hair. That can be the difference from making a play and not making a play."

The 6-foot-3 Uzo-Diribe also did his part to improve physically. He is up 25 pounds since last season, to about 255. Suddenly, he and Pericak are the veterans of the defensive line as returning starters.

"We're expecting Chidera to take on more of a leadership role so Will (Pericak) doesn't have to do it alone," said CU defensive line coach Kanavis McGhee, a former All-American for the Buffaloes. "Before, he was looking more to the seniors. He didn't know where he fit in."

"When we saw him in the spring, we saw a different mentality. As a coaching staff, we told him, 'We don't want to wait for you to become a player; that's not our philosophy.' "

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AUGUST 7, 2012, 2:22 PM

## Competition for playing time can be cruel, Colorado QB Connor Wood says

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

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Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post

Aspiring quarterback Connor Wood (5) warms up during a practice with the University of Colorado at Boulder football team on Aug. 6, 2012.

BOULDER — Colorado sophomore quarterback Connor Wood seems to have a good grasp of the cruel, hard reality of competing for playing time in college football. Or in any sport, for that matter.

Wood, a transfer from Texas who practiced with the Buffs last fall and during the spring, is competing with Kansas transfer Jordan Webb and returning sophomore Nick Hirschman to be Colorado's starting quarterback.

During my interview with Wood, I found his insights about competition to be very interesting.

"Competition brings out the best in guys," Wood said. "Some guys step up to the plate. Some guys sink.

"Basically, we had that saying up in our locker room about 'The Buffalo herd only survives through natural selection.' It's like, 'Only the strong survive.'

"That only builds the best in each other. That's what you want, bring in new guys, bring in new talent — not just at quarterback, but for all positions."

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ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE