

Safety has been nursing high ankle sprain since opener

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

Colorado safety Ray Polk spent most of the 2011 season injured but finding a way every week to play through the pain of a damaged wrist and fractured sternum to be on the field with his teammates.

He used to think it was frustrating competing when he was far from 100 percent.

But Polk has experienced a whole new level of frustration this season being forced to watch from the sidelines, despite feeling much better top to bottom than he did a year ago.

The one thing holding the senior back is among the most dreaded diagnosis in sports -- high ankle sprain.

Polk was injured in the season opener on Sept. 1 against Colorado State and hasn't played since. He suffered a torn tendon in his ankle along with unspecified ligament damage that he hopes won't require surgery. He announced this week he will definitely return to action at Southern Cal on Saturday (4:07 p.m. Pac-12 Network).

"I'm playing," Polk said. "It's definitely exciting. I'm happy to be out here practicing with these guys. It's good to be back out here. I know I'm not at 100 percent, but I think I can help the team out."

He has made being a help to the team rather than a hindrance the determining factor in when he returns to the field. He didn't feel quite right a week ago before the Arizona State game and opted not to play because he didn't want to miss a tackle or have a receiver run by him in coverage.

"The thing is, I'm starting to come to the realization that it's not going to get better any time soon," he said. "So I think a lot of it is about being out there and getting everybody lined up and everything and being functional and a help to the team. If I see that I'm not being a help to the team, then I will be the first one to say, 'Hey, take me out. I'm not doing my job correctly.'"

Polk has been named a captain in five of the first six games this season, even though he only played in part of the season opener before suffering the ankle injury.

"The fact that he is not out there on the field, he still is a big influence for us and still does a lot with those young guys," coach Jon Embree said.

CU's head coach noted that during the first half of the season while recovering from his injury, Polk acted like a captain in everything he did. He said Polk regularly meets with his teammates on Monday nights to watch film. He said Polk has been active in meetings even though he hasn't been playing. He quizzes teammates and works with players on Friday nights before games, too.

When game day arrives, Polk naturally fits into a coaching role offering tips and encouragement on the sidelines because he's been doing it all week in practice and meetings and the weight room.

Polk says the entire experience has been eye opening for him. He now is considering a career in coaching, which is at least one positive that has come from all the physical sacrifice he given to the program he loves.

"The biggest thing that is most annoying about this injury is I could play with the other stuff and I didn't mind doing it," he said. "I was happy to do it. I was happy to be able to go out there every day and perform to whatever

degree. But this is the most frustrating thing because I don't know how it's going to limit me. It's already cost me six games. I can't play through an ankle injury being in the secondary. It's just not functional. You're putting yourself at risk and more importantly, everybody else. It's the most frustrating thing I can think of, even more than a season-ending injury because that is definite and concrete. You are not going to play. This is a huge tease."

Polk said he doesn't remember the last time he felt completely healthy on the football field. It was likely either early last season or at some point in 2010 when he was a sophomore. But he was forced to miss last season's game against USC at Folsom Field because of a concussion he suffered the week before and he doesn't want to miss out a chance to play one of college football's legendary programs twice in his career.

"This is my only chance to play them and I'm finally feeling like I'm able to be functional on the field," Polk said. "So I'm looking forward to it."

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Hurricane Katrina forced CU wideout Gerald Thomas to grow up fast

By Tom Kensler *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — While some may be overwhelmed by the size of a college football roster, Colorado freshman receiver Gerald Thomas immediately felt right at home.

Don't look for Thomas to ever become claustrophobic in a crowd. After Hurricane Katrina forced his family to flee New Orleans in August 2005, Thomas was among 13 members of his family — including his parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins — who moved to the Dallas area and stayed in a hotel room with two beds for a month.

Some would sleep on the bed mattresses, some on the sets of box springs, others on air mattresses.

Thomas was 11 years old.

"I mean, it was crazy at the time," Thomas said. "But we all had to make it work the best we could. We all are very close, so it was kind of easy.

"All of us tried to make the best out of it. Even though things were going bad back home (in New Orleans), we tried to stay positive about everything. I matured fast. I knew I wouldn't have video games and stuff like that because we couldn't afford it. I had talks with my parents about that. It was OK."

Fortunately, Thomas' father is a professional chef and his grandmother also likes to cook.

"So we just ate," Thomas recalled with a grin.

Most of the family returned to New Orleans after that month. But Thomas (an only child) and his parents elected to remain in suburban Dallas. That proved to be a blessing for the budding football star.

Thomas lived in Plano, Texas, while in middle school. The family then moved to The Colony, where he would set eight school records for The Colony High School, including career receptions (127), yards (2,345) and touchdown catches (22).

"It was tough adjusting to the move to Texas at first," Thomas said. "But it was better in the long run. I ended up in Texas — the football capital. And the schools are better there."

Thomas, 5-foot-11 and 175 pounds, has been a bright spot for CU during a trying season. He ranks fourth on the team in receptions with 12, for 143 yards. Thomas also has rushed seven times for 44 yards on reverses or sweeps.

"Gerald was the first freshman that I noticed when he got up here because of his speed," said CU junior safety Parker Orms. "His speed is amazing. He made huge strides in (August) camp. The defense had a hard time covering and tackling him."

In February, Colorado signed three wide receivers from the Dallas area. Thomas became the only one to make it to the first day of classes in August. Jeff Thomas (6-3, 195) participated in 12 practices before returning to Duncanville to attend to family issues. Peyton Williams (6-1, 190) blew out a knee during the playoffs last December playing for Southlake Carroll High School and, like Jeff Thomas, he elected to delay his CU enrollment as a "grayshirt" to preserve a year of eligibility.

Jeff Thomas and Williams are expected to join Gerald Thomas on the CU roster next year. Also returning to the field will be the Buffs' top player, junior Paul Richardson, who is redshirting this fall to heal a surgically repaired knee. That athletic quartet will give the Buffs more explosiveness at wide receiver.

For this season, Gerald Thomas has become Colorado's lone breakaway threat.

"Gerald is a guy that's aggressive when the ball is in the air; he's not afraid to go across the middle," CU coach Jon Embree said. "He can be a guy that can make somebody miss (a tackle) and go a long way.

"He's a guy that we try to get him the ball in space and let him do something."

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Ray Polk's return badly needed for battered Colorado pass defense against Matt Barkley

By **JOHN HENDERSON** |  No Comments

USC is full of future NFL draft picks but the one man I'm keeping an eye on Saturday in the Coliseum is Colorado safety Ray Polk. The senior hasn't played a game healthy in two years. He played most of last year with a broken sternum and he hasn't played this year since suffering a high ankle sprain in the opener against Colorado State.

The Buffaloes' peach-fuzz secondary desperately needs him. They play two true freshmen in their nickel package and have been making mistakes all year.

He's listed as questionable for Saturday, which means he'll probably play. Last year USC's Matt Barkley threw six touchdown passes at Colorado. This year, his weaker stats have been scrutinized by everyone in southern California. His line is certainly weaker. However, he's also four TD passes from breaking Matt Leinart's team and Pac-12 career touchdown marks of 99.

Colorado is 118th out of 124 schools in pass efficiency defense (162.1), having given up 20 TD passes and intercepting only three. Let's see if Polk can play, then let's see if he can make a difference.

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