



*Daniel Munyer (52) has played three O-line positions in the past two games.
Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman*



Brooks: Munyer, Fellow O-Linemen Feel Need To Succeed

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BOULDER - In a perfect world, Daniel Munyer would settle in at one offensive line position and finish out the last 21 1/2 years of his Colorado football career.

But CU's football world has been a little shy of perfect this month and Munyer and his buds in the O-line remain realists. If there is to be a turnaround, they know where it must start. They also realize there are sacrifices to be made.

In the last two games, due to teammates being injured, Munyer has been called on to play left guard, right guard and center. He has stepped in and stepped up - although the back-and-forth adjustments have been challenging.

"Pretty difficult, actually," Munyer said. "From a technique standpoint you have to remember where your (blocking) help is, where you don't have help. You have to make sure of your correct sets, how far back you are, little things like that ... but they can make a big difference.

"I'm pretty comfortable with it now. I've practiced at all three since the summer, so when I'm thrown in there it's not like a big surprise. I'm ready to go. I feel like I'm getting a knack for the game every week and calming down every week, making sure I execute right. Ideally, you'd like to (settle at one position), but there's always

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situations where you're going to be called on and you've got to respond to that."

Munyer, a redshirt sophomore, might open at center again Saturday afternoon at Washington State (2 p.m. MDT, FX) in CU's Pac-12 Conference opener. But that depends on the availability of starting center Gus Handler, who missed the Fresno State game with an ankle sprain and currently is listed as questionable.

Redshirt freshman Brad Cotner and Munyer shared the position last weekend, but Cotner is out this week (and possibly four more) with a big toe injury. That leaves starting left guard Alex Lewis in an emergency role at center, a position his father (Bill) played at Nebraska and for seven NFL seasons.

Cotner's injury, said CU line coach Steve Marshall, is "a real shame . . . he's busted his tail for two years and finally got the opportunity. I knew he was hurt, he said he was fine - but he wouldn't walk in front of me. We finally pulled him in the third quarter (after 31 snaps); he tore up that toe pretty good."

Depending on Handler's health, Marshall's starters Saturday could be Handler/Munyer at center, Lewis at left guard, Munyer/Ryan Dannewitz at right guard, David Bakhtiari at left tackle and Jack Harris at right tackle. Or some combination thereof probably involving Dannewitz, whose versatility matches Munyer's.

Redshirt freshmen Stephane Nembot and Marc Mustoe, both tackles, and true freshman guard Jeromy Irwin played last weekend. Marshall said all three could play in sub roles this week. He also mentioned freshman Alex Kelley as a possibility at center.

No matter who Marshall's first five are, Saturday's priority will remain what it was in week one - running the ball successfully. In individual meetings this week with the O-linemen, coach Jon Embree strongly emphasized the need for "four ugly yards at a time," according to Munyer and Lewis.

"We need to control the tempo and keep the defense off the field," Munyer said. "We want 12- to 14-play drives . . . three, four, five yards at a time so our defense can make all their adjustments and do what they need to do. That's what our goal is right now."

The Buffs have shown a potent running game only once this season, gaining 153 yards (freshman Christian Powell got 147) two games ago against Sacramento State. The ground total against Colorado State was 58, with 110 against Fresno State.

In Powell, said Marshall, "We found a guy who can really run the ball . . . he's a talented young guy. As we evolve offensively, we've got to do a better job up front from a consistency standpoint and we as coaches have to find ways to put those young guys in the best possible positions. I think each week we're moving in that direction. Are we there yet? Absolutely not.

"But it's not a lot different than pass protection . . . it's not a 10-man process, it's an 11-man process. That's kind of the state of our offensive football team in all phases."

Falling behind 35-0 in the first quarter at Fresno State, CU's offensive game plan evaporated - or as Lewis put it, "That closes your playbook, it shuts off half your playbook. Our O-line is confident in what we're doing and we're going to keep doing it. We've just got to refine the craft. We're definitely going to come out at Washington State and run the ball. We'll see from there."

The Buffs also allowed five quarterback sacks last weekend, running their three-game total to a Pac-12 worst 12. All sacks don't fall to the O-line. "Every sack has a story," said Marshall. "There are reasons . . . we've given up a few sacks because we've been behind quite a bit and been throwing more than we should have to. We've got to continue to do a better job protection wise, a better job of running routes and getting open . . . it's an 11-man process."

Still, accurate or not, he and his group usually find themselves as primary targets for the finger-pointers.

"Whenever something goes wrong (offensively) it always falls back on the O-line," Munyer said. "So we kind of have to accept that. You realize you have to make the corrections . . . we just want to control whatever we can, correct our own mistakes."

Added Lewis: "When you're at the bottom (in sack stats), there's only one way to go - up. As an O-line, we have to watch tape, find corrections, fix them and get the ball rolling again. This program is going through some tough times right now and the O-line is going to be a major factor in turning things around. If we don't turn it around, the team's not going to go anywhere."

Washington State's defense features multiple fronts and has sacked opposing QBs eight times in three games, tying the Cougars for fourth place in the Pac-12 with Utah and Oregon. WSU senior defensive end Travis Long is the conference's sack leader (four), and Marshall says Long "plays all over the place - as their 'will' (linebacker), their 'plug' (linebacker) or down in a four-down front. It seems like he's been there forever; I remember us playing against him when I was at Cal. He's really developed into a good player. You can see them each week deciding what they're doing the best and how they're fitting their personnel in."

If the Buffs can balance their offense this week, it obviously will ease the burden on Marshall and his players in QB protection. But given the sacks already allowed, Marshall added, "Do I think (opponents) will come after us? Absolutely. Every week is no different. If we were 3-0 it would be no different than now."

But at 0-3, stuff has been coming at the Buffs from every angle - on the field and off. Munyer said with conference play starting, he feels a new energy among his group and the offense. "We're very excited," he said. "We're ready to get this thing going . . . ready to get our first win."

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SHOW MENU



Team has rushed for 150 yards or more three times under Jon Embree

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

No one inside the Colorado football program seems to be able to answer the question that might be the key to immediate improvement, long-term success and whether or not the current coaching staff remains employed.

Why can't the Buffs run the ball?

When he was hired in December 2010, coach Jon Embree said he needed to establish a mentality within his team for playing physical football on both sides of the ball.

"When this program has been at its best, it's had its guys come out on this field or go somewhere else and just line up and run you over," Embree said at the time. "On defense, we'll line up and hit you until you don't want to take it anymore. We have to be physical."

It clearly hasn't happened yet.

No one expected the Buffs to be a finished product 16 games into Embree's tenure, but no one expected them to be losing battles on the line of scrimmage and getting steamrolled by Fresno State, as was the case in a 69-14 loss last week.

CU travels to Washington State on Saturday where its beleaguered defense will face 60 passing plays from an offensive system coach Mike Leach used for a decade at Texas Tech. It's just the sort of game where a physical running game from the CU offense could counteract Leach's approach, give the CU defense rest and keep the Buffs in the game.

But Embree and his staff haven't been able to rely on their running game so far. It's inconsistent at best. For every good day the Buffs have had on the ground under this coaching staff, there have been two or three bad days.

Colorado has rushed for 150 yards or more as a team in a game just three times so far under Embree and offensive coordinator Eric Bienenmy, who is the program's all-time leading rusher. The offense has produced just three individual 100-yard rushing performances under Embree and Bienenmy as well.

In fairness to CU coaches, roughly half the games in Embree's tenure have been blowouts in which the CU offense needed to throw often to try to get back in the game. But it's also fair to ask whether coaches should have given up on the running game prematurely at times. Last week's game at Fresno State could be a good example of that.

When asked this week why he chose to go away from the running game so quickly against the Bulldogs, Embree said it was because the Buffs had fallen behind so quickly, he felt the best chance to get back in the game was passing the ball.

CU fell behind 21-0 midway through the first quarter and freshman running back Christian Powell, who had provided one of those 100-yard days a week earlier against Sacramento State, was suddenly a non-factor.

Considering it was still only the middle of the first quarter if the Buffs had persisted with the running game they might have been able to slow Fresno State's momentum and even turn it in their favor.

It doesn't help that CU will likely be without starting center Gus Handler again this week and that backup center

Brad Cotner is out for 4-6 weeks with a toe injury. That means guard Daniel Munyer will likely start at center and will be relied on to make the calls in the trenches. Munyer did start the first three games of the 2011 season at center before suffering an injury.

There are indications that coaches recognize they need to establish consistency somewhere and branch out from there. Embree said coaches significantly simplified things for the Fresno State game with hopes that it would allow younger players to play faster and think less. Embree said he plans the same approach this week, which could mean sticking with the running game.

"Really right now, it is about playing better from the mistake and assignment standpoint," Embree said. "So adding new schemes and wrinkles will just make it worse. So we will continue to streamline and to get it to where we can play fast and better from a mistake standpoint."

Colorado says Washington State spread offense better than its stats

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Washington State enters Saturday's home game against Colorado averaging only two points per game more than the Buffaloes (21.7 to 19.7), and the average yards of total offense generated by the football teams is comparable.

But that doesn't make the Cougars' spread offense any less frightening, Colorado coaches and players said — not with offensive mastermind Mike Leach calling the plays.

Just watch some tape of Leach's former Texas Tech teams, Colorado defensive coordinator Greg Brown said.

"He's awesome. The guy is an offensive genius," Brown said of the first-year Cougars coach. "The level that he competed in the Big 12 South, year in and year out, competing against Texas and Oklahoma and Texas A&M and Oklahoma State, that's staggering. You stand up and salute that."

"He did it his way, throwing the ball around and causing defensive coordinators a lot of sleepless nights," Brown added. "It's a tough go against Mike Leach."

Leach inherited an offensive line that has been slow to adjust to the wide splits. But quarterbacks Jeff Tuel (who is coming off a knee injury) and Connor Halliday have strong arms, and the Cougars' receiver corps led by senior Marquess Wilson (6-foot-4, 185 pounds), sophomore Isiah Myers (6-0, 176) and freshman Gabe Marks (6-0, 167) may be as talented as any trio that Leach had at Texas Tech.

It's not unusual for Washington State to split out five receivers. Running the football is almost an afterthought. The Cougars rank last among Pac-12 teams in rushing with a measly 62 ground yards per game.

"We play against spread offenses almost every week," said CU junior safety Parker Orms. "What makes theirs tough is they have really good receivers. They've got receivers that can go inside and outside. They run a lot of different routes."

In addition to showing game film of Washington State's first three games — 30-6 loss to Brigham Young, 24-20 win over Eastern Washington, 35-27 win over UNLV — CU's Brown also has had his defense review tape of two recent victories by the Buffs over Leach-coached Texas Tech teams.

In 2006, then Colorado coach Dan Hawkins posted his first victory with the Buffs, a stunning 30-6 upset of Texas Tech in Boulder. The following year, Colorado won 31-26 in Lubbock.

Brown was Colorado's defensive backfield coach for both of those victories.

"Coach Brown said we have the ability to be just like those CU secondaries," Orms said. "We just have to go into the game believing we can do it, and then execute."

Colorado coach Jon Embree said that execution must include sound tackling against an offense that features quick-strike, short passes and relies on receivers to get yards after the catch.

"When you do a good job of tackling," Embree said, "the field shrinks, and it swings back to your favor defensively."