

Inexperienced group will have to battle to see playing time

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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A year ago, Nick Kasa emerged as a go-to weapon in the Colorado offense, while Vincent Hobbs displayed some star potential at times.

As the Buffaloes' prepare for the upcoming football season, both are gone -- Kasa was drafted in sixth round of the NFL Draft by the Oakland Raiders and Hobbs, who would have been a sophomore, left the program this summer.

What's left at tight end is a collection of walk-ons, former walk-ons and unheralded players who haven't proven a whole lot on the field.

Nobody really knows what to expect from the tight end position, but the group is determined to make its presence known.

"We most definitely want to prove that we are a noteworthy position and teams need to take us seriously," said junior Kyle Slavin, whose 14 catches in 2012 are tops among the returning tight ends. "I think we've also kind of had the mentality that we're just going to put our heads down and not worry about the buzz and what others are saying.

"It's going to be something that we do as a unit this year more than individual."

Tight ends coach Klayton Adams said there isn't anybody in the group who stands out above the rest right now, but he likes the potential.

"I think it's a tough group and I think that there are some players that are developing there," he said. "The best thing about them is they understand that being a good college football player is about improving every day. They're all doing that."

Adams points to Slavin and seniors Scott Fernandez and Alex Wood as being the leaders of the group. Together, they caught just 22 passes for 283 yards and two touchdowns last year, but they've all been on the field a lot during their careers.

"They're older guys, they've all played, they understand the deal," Adams said. "All three of them have a little bit of a unique skill set from one another, so I think you can utilize all three of those guys."

A pair of redshirt freshmen -- Sean Irwin and Austin Ray -- have caught Adams' eye, too. They, along with Hobbs, were three-star recruits from the 2012 class.

"Sean Irwin is a guy who, these first (few) days of camp, has appeared to have gotten a lot bigger, a lot stronger and a lot faster," Adams said.

"I think (Ray) has taken a big jump since spring also. He's a big guy, a big strong body. Through two installs, he feels very comfortable with what we're doing offensively."

Adams said he's eager to see how Ray develops. A year ago, Ray spent a lot of time as a scout team offensive lineman out of necessity and didn't get a chance to develop as much as a tight end. He's been growing more at that position since new head coach Mike MacIntyre and his staff arrived.

"I'm really excited to get out there and be able to prove myself and earn some playing time," Ray said.

Another intriguing player in the mix is true freshman Connor Center. He didn't play football in high school and didn't sign until this summer, but he's the biggest tight end in the group at 6-foot-7, 240 pounds.

There may not be any Mackey Award candidates in the group right now, but this still could be a solid position for the Buffs.

"I think we'll really produce in our position," Ray said. "I feel that we have hard working guys who will really step up and do what it takes to produce."

Just how much the tight ends see the field is up to them, however. In fact, just a few days into camp, Adams wasn't even sure how often the tight ends will be utilized.

"It'll depend on how much we feel like that position is one of our best 11," he said. "We're going to use more than 11 guys, but when you find out who your best 11 guys are, you try to put them on the field a little bit more than everybody else. So, if we feel like there are two tight ends who are in our top 15 or whatever, we'll use it a lot. If there's only one, we might use it a little bit less. It just depends on how fast we come along and how good our receiving crew looks."

For the tight ends to play a major role in the offense, Adams needs several of them to step up during fall camp.

"I would hope by the end of camp there are three or four guys that we feel very comfortable putting on the field," Adams said.

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Football: CU Buffs defensive line working on its fitness

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Near the conclusion of spring practice in mid-April, Colorado defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat said his position group needed to get into better shape.

Four months later, Jeffcoat is pleased with how the group is progressing in that regard.

"They're starting to improve on it," Jeffcoat said on Friday, the fourth day of fall camp. "Obviously there's a lot more that has to be done. We have enough time to get it done; it's just that they have to understand that every day we've got to improve a little bit. They're really working hard on trying to do those things (to improve)."

Facing fast-paced offenses on a regular basis in the Pac-12 Conference, the Buffs need well-conditioned linemen who can be on the field for several plays in a row.

"When you play up-tempo teams, you can't substitute as freely because you can't get them off and on the field," Jeffcoat said. "They might have to be in there an extended period of time."

"They understand that you've got to be in probably the best shape of your life to handle this."

Sophomore Josh Tupou was one of several players required to lose weight. He went from about 330 pounds at the start of the summer to about 315 now, he said. He'd like to lose another 10-15 pounds. And, he's not the only one. The whole group took the conditioning challenge seriously.

"Yeah, we did a good job and came in (to camp) in a lot better shape, but we still have to get into better shape if we want to be where we want to be and do what we want to do as a defense," Tupou said. "We're still working at it."

"It's making us a better defensive line unit. But, where we want to be condition-wise, we're not there yet."

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Football: CU Buffs' Jimmie Gilbert impresses early

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado true freshman Jimmie Gilbert, a defensive end from College Station, Tex., has had a good first week. Defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat said the 6-foot-4, 220-pounder has been one of the most noticeable defensive linemen in the early going.

"He reminds me of when I first came in (to Arizona State as a freshman in 1979)," Jeffcoat said. "He's about 20 pounds heavier than when I first started. I was 205, he's about 220-225, and he's got length. And, he's got really, really athletic hips. He can move and he can bend. He's really good in space; that's what makes him exciting for me, how he plays in space."

Jeffcoat wouldn't commit to saying Gilbert will play a lot, but said it's a possibility if Gilbert continues doing what he's doing.

"It depends on how he progresses and how he matures in the next couple of weeks," Jeffcoat said. "If he does, he'll have an opportunity."

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