

Football: Health will be key for CU Buffs' offensive line

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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The Colorado football team might have had one of the best offensive lines in the Pac-12 Conference this season if left tackle David Bakhtiari didn't bolt for the NFL a season early and Alex Lewis hadn't opted to transfer to Nebraska.

Both played more than 700 snaps on the left side of the offense last season, albeit in a 1-11 season with little offensive success.

Replacing those former Buffs and building better chemistry among the entire offensive line group has been the focus for veterans such as Daniel Munyer, Gus Handler and Jack Harris this offseason. This group wants to be the backbone of the team and understands how important it is that they start moving the ball and scoring points more effectively in a the high-flying Pac-12.

"I think we're capable of that," Munyer said. "Some of us have been through some extremely adverse situations. Some of us, this is our third coaching staff. A lot of us only won one game last year and that builds on you. It motivates you to strive to do better in everything you do. There is only so much someone can take and I really feel all the little stuff and all the big stuff that has been happening with us, it's made us more collective as a group and wanting to succeed more and to show our fans that we're here to play for you guys and to play for Colorado and not to make it look like we're giving no effort."

Harris is expected to start at left tackle, Handler at center and Munyer at right guard. Third-year sophomore Stephane Nembot is the likely starter at right tackle after playing 422 snaps last year, most of which came in the second half of the season. Left guard will likely be manned by either sophomore Jeromy Irwin or junior Kaiwi Crabb, both of whom would be breaking new ground as a regular starter.

Munyer is continuing to heal from a fibula fracture suffered during spring football in March. He said coaches have told him they will limit him at the start of training camp as a precaution, but he expects to be at full strength later in August and by the time the season begins.

It will be critical for the offensive line to stay healthy this season because there is not a lot of experienced depth behind the projected starters.

The Buffs return to the practice fields Tuesday and begin the season Sept. 1 in Denver against Colorado State. The group is coached this season by veteran offensive line coach Gary Bernardi, whose blocking system features different terminology but not wholesale technique changes from the past two years.

Bernardi has kept things simple on the field and the attitude he is attempting to build in the Buffs in even simpler.

"I think the one thing we want to establish this year, and Bernardi talks about it all the time, is finishing," Munyer said. "He'll say strain. Strain to finish every play, strain to finish your rep, strain

to finish in the classroom, anything.

"If you see the ball go down field to a receiver, don't just sit there. Go to the ball because you never know. Someone could fumble and you could be the guy right there to pick it up."

There might not be more of a sure thing when it comes to preseason predictions in the Pac-12 Conference than this: The Buffs will not give up 52 sacks again this season.

A lack of speed at wide receiver and long developing passing plays led to CU quarterbacks being thrown to the turf regularly in 2012. A drastic improvement in speed on the perimeter along with much more three-step drops and short routes will help the Buffs trim the sack totals this year.

Munyer said it should also help that the offensive line has invested more in each other this year and already feels more cohesive entering training camp than it has at times in recent seasons. The group has made it a point to go to dinner together at least once a week this summer and veterans are doing what they can to make sure freshmen feel included and are learning and improving and not just standing and watching.

"I really think this summer we've grown as an O-line," Munyer said. "We've taken that extra step in terms of bonding together and not only working collectively on the field, but we'll call each other out. If you jump offsides or something, you have 10 up-downs or something like that. It's making everyone accountable to each other."

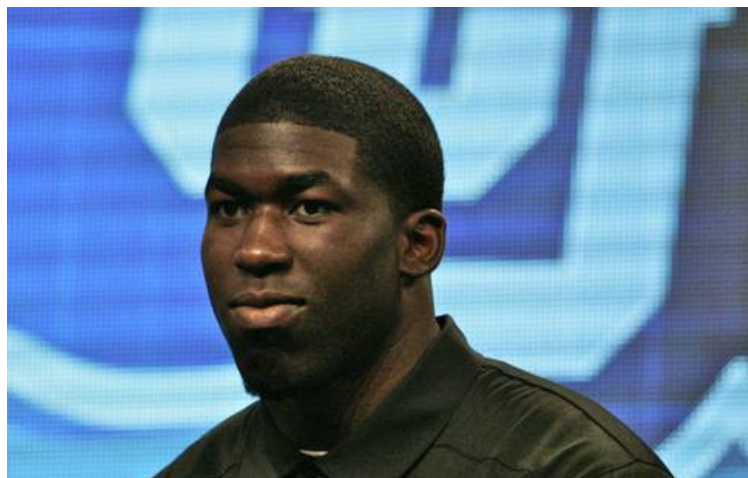
It will be a month before we know for sure how far they've come.

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FOOTBALL: Uzo-Diribe takes leadership role at Colorado


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DAVID LASSEN/STAFF PHOTO

Colorado defensive lineman Chidera Uzo-Diribe, from Corona High, takes his role as a team captain seriously.

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Text Size

 BY DAVID LASSEN | STAFF WRITER | July 31, 2013; 04:12 PM | [Comments \(0\)](#)

CULVER CITY — The Colorado football team is once again in transition.

Chidera Uzo-Diribe is doing his best to make the change a smooth one.

The defensive lineman from Corona High was recruited by one coaching staff, played his first three years for another and now, as a senior, will be part of the first Buffaloes team coached by Mike MacIntyre, hired in December after leading San Jose State to a 10-2 record in 2012, that

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- ☐ No. Regardless of cost, we need to make certain that pedestrians and motorists cannot veer into the paths of trains.
- ☐ Yes. Millions of dollars have been spent to bolster divert traffic and warn motorists and pedestrians.
- ☐ Perhaps. Sure, we can spend more and buy more safety. However, the only sure-fire solution is to stay away from the tracks.
- ☐ I don't know



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school's first 10-win season in 25 years.

"For me, it's been easy," Uzo-Diribe said during a conversation at Pac-12 Media Day. "This is my second coaching change, so I know what to expect and how to approach it. ... It wasn't (rough) at all, because I knew to buy in right away. The faster you get a team to buy in, the easier the transition becomes."

MacIntyre says the process of establishing the culture he wants to a program that last had a winning season in 2005 — and is 25-61 since — has gone well but "hasn't always gone smoothly."

He adds, "I'd say 95 percent of our guys are right on beam. But any time there's change, it's hard. ... There's always those situations where guys aren't buying in the way we would like them to. It really kind of hurts team, because if they're not truly buying in, they feel isolated from the team in a way."

As one of four senior captains — the bridge that

"As leaders," he said, "you just have the team and the program."

Being voted as a captain by his team leadership role.

"I just try to lead by example every day in my actions on and off the field, and also become more of a vocal leader, to tell the guys what we need to do in order to get where we're going."

It's exactly what MacIntyre wants from his captains.

"A captain, in my program, is one that's committed to be successful, that cares about all the details ... to push other people to do things the right way.

"You can't just do. You've also got to be vocal. But you have to act. You have to do what you're saying."

Reflecting Uzo-Diribe's focus on the big picture, he says he's setting no individual goals for the season ahead, after leading the team in sacks (seven) and tackles for loss (10) as part of his 43 total tackles.

"I just have a team goal," he said, "and that's to get to a bowl game. As a senior, I would love to end my last season here being bowl-eligible."

Something of a football late bloomer — he was a basketball-first athlete until late in his high school career — the 6-foot-3, 250-pound Uzo-Diribe takes pride in his development while at Colorado, where he was initially a pass-rush specialist.

"I'm seeing that I'm a more complete player now, able to play against the run and the pass," he said. "So it's good I've seen my game elevated while I've been here."

But he's proudest of something else — simply that he'll finish what he started at Colorado.

"Even with all the coaching changes and the (difficult) seasons, I've been able to stick through it," he said. "There have been a couple guys who have transferred out of the program, but I can say I've stuck through it, and hopefully I'm going to see this thing through and turn around."



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