

Football: CU Buffs' Malcolm Creer overcoming learning disability

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Nearly a decade ago when Colorado running back Malcolm Creer was in middle school in the Los Angeles area he first noticed he wasn't getting the scores he thought he should on some of his tests.

Creer studied hard. Nothing less was acceptable in his mother's home. Donna Jones, a nurse who works with patients with special needs, wanted as many doors as possible to be open for her children. So she always held them to high standards with their schooling.

But Creer's hard work wasn't being rewarded when tests were graded. He sensed something was wrong but he wasn't sure what was causing his poor test scores.

It didn't take long to determine he had a learning disability. Creer was later diagnosed with dyslexia, a condition that interferes with a person's reading ability and comprehension.

With patience and perseverance, Creer was able to work his way through Palisades High School academically while he thrived athletically. He became a standout ball carrier and was named first-team All-CIF in his senior season. He earned a scholarship to CU to play for former coach Jon Embree and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, who knows a thing or two about good running backs being the school's all-time leading rusher.

The academic bar was raised for Creer once again when he arrived in Boulder, but working with the athletic department's academic advisers and his professors he discovered he could succeed here as well.

"I had the opportunity to meet with Malcolm and his mom during his recruiting visit to CU," said Kris Livingston, CU assistant athletic director for academics. "I knew right then that he was going to be successful. (Sometimes you just know.)"

"With great support from his mother, he was engaged in the conversation about academics. He asked thoughtful questions and paid attention to the answers. Since Malcolm has been at CU, he has made the greatest of impressions on our entire academic staff. As a student he is engaged, works hard, and wants to learn."

Creer has done so well, in fact, he was honored this spring with the prestigious Clancy A. Herbst, Jr., Student-Athlete Achievement Award. The honor is earned by two student-athletes in the entire department each year. It goes to those who have overcome personal, academic or emotional difficulties to succeed both academically and athletically. Brian Owens from the track team was Creer's fellow honoree.

"That award means a lot," Creer said. "Just seeing that I'm being recognized for my academics and everything I've been through. It felt good to actually get an award in college. I have that on my resume now."

Creer said he never really had any self-esteem problems after learning he has dyslexia.

"It's just who I am," Creer said. "Everyone needs extra help with something. It can be extra help on the field or extra help from the coaches with something. Everyone needs help somewhere. So it's just the person I am."

He is allowed to take tests in a separate room from the rest of his class because his competitive spirit sometimes gets the best of him. If he sees others finishing ahead of him, he is prone to rushing to complete his work. Losing focus, leads to errors and misunderstanding questions.

CU also allows Creer and others with the same disability to use a reader, someone who reads the questions on a test to him to ensure he interprets them correctly.

Michele Brannigan, a senior learning specialist in the athletic department, said she often runs into Creer in the Dal Ward Center carrying his laptop to find her. He wants to make sure he is comprehending what he has typed or what he is reading.

"He wants to always make sure he gets it right," Brannigan said.

Overcoming his learning disability hasn't been the only challenge for Creer in his two years as a Buff. In the eighth game of his freshman season in 2011, Creer agreed to pull his redshirt and play after injuries had caused depth issues in the Buffs' backfield. He suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in the second game in which he played.

Creer made it back last season and played in six games on offense, rushing just seven times for 22 yards. Now that he is nearly two years removed from his injury, he is hoping to rebound and make a larger impact in 2013. CU players report Aug. 5 and begin practices on Aug. 6.

Creer has turned a challenging part of his life into a positive. He first began to think he might follow in his mother's footsteps during a Take Your Child to Work Day. He is majoring in speech, language and hearing sciences with hopes of helping people with disabilities after leaving CU.

"I'm fascinated with people's ears and how we hear things and our brain interprets things so quickly," Creer said. "Having a disability overall, I just feel like that major is what I need. I want to help other people and people who are deaf or anything like that. It's just my personality to help others."

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