



Bufs' work has just begun

Position battles abound as CU opens camp

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, August 6, 2008

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins bounded through the wrought iron gates fronting the football practice fields Tuesday morning for the start of his third training camp in Boulder. Armed with a contract extension through the 2012 season, still yet to be signed, Hawkins wore a straw hat and smile as he passed a banner greeting players with the word of the day -- excellence.

If all goes according to Hawkins' plan, that word will define the coming season and the program will make significant progress toward the 47-year-old coach's ultimate goal of winning a national championship.

But there is a lot of work to be done to get there.

The Bufs began drills with newcomers and a smattering of veterans working together in the morning and most of the upperclassmen taking the field in the afternoon. Ballyhooed freshman running backs Darrell Scott and Ray Polk attracted plenty of attention, but fans were also excited to get their first look at others such as linebacker Jon Major, tight end Ryan Deehan or offensive lineman Max Tuioti-Mariner.

Hawkins had been on the field for only a few moments when he saw his first opportunity to do a little coaching.

Junior college transfer linebacker Shaun Mohler walked through the gates with his helmet off. Hawkins corrected the infraction.

"Shaun put on your helmet and go back and run through the gate," Hawkins said from 30 yards away. Mohler complied and provided a consistent steady effort the rest of the way.

Hawkins and his staff have plenty of issues to resolve over the next 25 days leading up to the season opener against Colorado State at Invesco Field in Denver. One issue that won't demand much of their time is deciding who the starting quarterback will be.

For the first time in three years since Joel Klatt's senior season, the Bufs have an incumbent starter in Cody Hawkins, who would probably have to experience a nightmarish August to lose his job. Cody Hawkins started all 13 games for the Bufs last season and proved in spring he remains the best man for the job. He looked about 10 pounds heavier Tuesday than he did in April and was sharp in directing the offense.

While coaches are confident they have their signal caller, they have some work to do in deciding who

will carry the ball, who will fill two guard spots on the offensive line, who will earn the starting spot at right defensive end, who will play cornerback, which linebackers are ready and who will handle the field goal duties.

The Bufs got through most the first day without losing a player to injury, until guard Mike Iltis needed help off the field in the afternoon practice. One year ago, walk-on wide receiver Cameron Ham suffered a broken leg on the opening day and missed the entire season following surgery.

"It's hard to sit on the sideline," Ham said. "I'm glad to be back out here."

Last year junior college transfer Drew Hudgins also spent the first day of camp with a glum look on his face after rupturing an Achilles tendon. He spent the past year battling back and was finally allowed to participate in contact work Tuesday.

"It's one of those injuries where it's probably never going to be the same," Hudgins said. "But I'm good enough where I can go out there and compete. That's what is important to me."

Senior defensive tackle Brandon Nicolas also was back in action after missing the spring game with a torn muscle in his shoulder. He said he did not require surgery and the injury healed on its own about a month after spring. Nicolas and fellow senior defensive tackle George Hypolite will be relied on as the heart and soul of the defense this season.

Offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said massive sophomore tackles Ryan Miller and Nate Solder will each practice at both tackle spots in the coming week and he will decide within the first 10 days of camp which side each will play this season. Miller practiced on the left side and Solder on the right on Tuesday.

Grimes said he was disappointed to learn senior Erick Faatagi had been ruled academically ineligible, ending his career without ever playing a down for CU. However, Grimes said Faatagi had not separated himself in spring drills and was far from locked into a starting spot at guard.

Two more practices are scheduled today with newcomers in the morning and veterans in the evening.



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Hansen ready to soak up knowledge

Freshman QB has lots to learn as camp begins

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, August 6, 2008

A few years from now Tyler Hansen might be the most popular guy on the Colorado football team. Starting quarterbacks often are.

But during his first day in the program Tuesday, when the kickoff of training camp arrived, the freshman from Temecula, Calif., was nearly anonymous. He's wearing No. 9 and taking snaps with senior Nick Nelson and sophomore Kyle Black in the morning sessions this week.

Hansen said he reported to Boulder in early July and was able to participate in some seven-on-seven work conducted by the players this summer. He said veteran quarterbacks such as Nelson and Cody Hawkins have been teaching him the offense.

The next few weeks will be a whirlwind of learning, making mistakes and developing an understanding of what is expected and how to meet the standard.

On his first day under a gold helmet though, he managed to not worry much about all that. He simply enjoyed being back on the football field and realizing a dream of joining a Division I program in earnest.

"It's a lot of fun just being out here enjoying what you do the most," Hansen said.

Hansen wasn't the only true freshman quarterback breaking in with the program. Cameron Wright, who played last fall at Ralston Valley High School, joined the team as a walk-on this summer. He practiced in the afternoon with veterans Hawkins and Matt Ballenger.

Offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich has six quarterbacks with which to work this year. It is the most signal-callers he has had under his direction since coming to Boulder from Arizona State in 2006.

Helfrich said coaches don't have their minds made up about any player this early in camp, so he encourages true freshmen to attack training camp and try to prove themselves. If they have what it takes to play right away, they will earn the opportunity. If not, they will redshirt.

But his primary message to Hansen and Wright at the outset of their careers is about making smart choices.

"Right now they're going to make a lot of mistakes," Helfrich said. "They're going to miss a signal. They're going to call something backwards. They're going to, in their mind, flip something over. That's going to happen. But taking care of the football and decisions with the football those are the things you

really want to ingrain in them right now. That's vital."

Hansen has the pedigree to be a success in major college sports. His father, Rick was a quarterback at San Diego State (1978-1983) and was cut by the Chicago Bears on the final day of training camp in 1984. His mother, Pamela, was an All-American sprinter and hurdler at SDSU.

Watching games from the sidelines in a redshirt season will take a little getting used to for Hansen, who was rated a three-star prospect by recruiting services. He was the athlete of the year at his high school as a senior. He played first base and pitcher for the baseball team and also ran track.

He threw for nearly 4,000 yards and ran for 900 more in two seasons as the starting quarterback. He said he plans to be a sponge during his first year in Boulder.

"You've just got to approach it like you learn as much as you can and get ready for the next year," Hansen said. "Obviously this year I've got to sit behind Cody and learn whatever I can. I'm going to ask him a lot of questions and take whatever I can from him."



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CU FOOTBALL: Buffs get first look at freshmen

DARRELL SCOTT AND CO. REPORT FOR THE FIRST DAY OF FALL PRACTICE

By ELIOT DEMPSEY Colorado Daily Sports Editor
Originally published 12:00 a.m., August 6, 2008
Updated 10:13 a.m., August 6, 2008

The University of Colorado held their first day of fall football practice Tuesday and all eyes were on No.2, running back Darrell Scott.

While Scott is the most heralded freshman to step foot on the CU campus is recent memory, he was not the only newcomer who turned heads. Fellow frosh running backs Ray Polk and Rodney Stewart each passed the eyeball test as well, according to CU running backs coach Darian Hagan.

"It's like the first day of school and you want to be the best dressed. Darrell wants to be the best dressed, Rodney wants to be the best dressed, Ray wants to be the best dressed," said Hagan.

It's no fashion show on the Buffs' practice fields, but with freshmen like linebacker Doug Rippy and offensive lineman Max Tuioiti-Mariner, as well as Hagan's talented trio, first impressions ran high. CU head coach Dan Hawkins said he does not put much into the eyeball test, but did notice a few things. "I try not to get into that too much, but I did at one point look over at Rippy and go, 'Well that guy is kinda big.'"

The Buffs will practice without pads until August 9, and until then practices are focused more on getting people to understand their roles, knowing when to go and how fast to get there. The practices are split between newcomers in the morning and veterans in the afternoon in order to help the young guys learn at their own pace while the vets can practice what they already know.

"You know, everything is always in the details with young guys," said Hawkins. "Just finishing things and working on the details, working on finishing and running the ball."

Running the ball is something that the Buffs will be doing a lot of in the upcoming season with so much talent at the position, but Hagan has his hands full thus far.

"They are just doing everything too fast," said Hagan. "I told them, the first two running plays we put in today are the most important plays we are going to run and you have to be patient to be successful running those plays, and they were just doing it too fast. Once we got to the individual period and they understood what we were trying to accomplish, they started to pick it up."

For players like Scott, who just moved into his dorm room yesterday, everything is predicated on studying the playbook and staying in good shape. He has enough to worry about as an incoming freshman student, let alone athlete.

However, that did not stop coaches from adding a wrinkle to the playbook. Scott was seen punting the ball with the regular punters and kickers, and was punting around 40 yards consistently. It is a skill that Scott said he picked up in the sixth grade playing soccer, and now has his CU coaches excited.

"Coach wanted to put that in. He said we have never had a punter/runner back there," said Scott.

The 6-foot, 220-pound running back also let it be known that he is ambidextrous. He kicks with his left leg, his right leg is his dominant leg, he throws with his right arm and catches with his left arm.

"I have to have my whole body, if I don't have my whole body... wow," said Scott.

CU coaches are probably thinking the same thing.

Practices are open to the public and run from 9:45-11:45 a.m. for newcomers and 4:30-6:30 p.m. for veterans.

Contact Eliot Dempsey about this story at (303) 443-6272 ext. 112 or sports@coloradodaily.com



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Bufs begin to shape ballyhooed tailback

Darrell Scott is just like any other freshman in that he is dealing with a steep learning curve.

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Top recruit Darrell Scott shows his power to his new CU teammates. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Five-star or otherwise, freshmen are freshmen.

Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich had

to stop a play before the snap Tuesday morning and move ballyhooed tailback Darrell Scott half a step to the left in the backfield.

A few minutes earlier, running backs coach Darian Hagan got in Scott's ear for slanting to the outside rather than darting between the tackles, as the call was designed.

At 6-feet-2 and 220 pounds, Scott looks physically ready to play. Learning the mental side, along with the nuances of the game, takes time.

Internet sites ranked Scott as high as the nation's No. 2 recruit for all positions, but CU coach Dan Hawkins believes that although not all freshmen are created equal, they

Colorado Football

- [Watch video](#) CU freshman running back Darrell Scott at his first practice Tuesday
- [Visit Tom Kensler's All Things Bufs blog](#) for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports

should be treated as such.

There are no pedestals to be found on the Buffaloes' practice fields. Hagan did not hesitate to chew out Scott for a mistake.

"Coach Hagan is just critiquing me," Scott told reporters after the morning session of the team's first day of two-a-day practices. "He just wants everything perfect, because once it's time for a game, there's no time for mess-ups. I've never had a running backs coach, and he's just coaching me up."

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Reading defenses is all new. In high school, even in talent-rich Southern California, it's usually a case of "get it and go." There's no reason to clutter the instinctual mind-set of a blue-chip running back with X's and O's.

At the college level, however, it's a good idea to know where to run and what to avoid.

"I think Coach Hagan will get me right on that one," Scott said of learning to read defenses. "I'll get it."

Mental mistakes are to be expected during August drills, especially the first one. As Helfrich said of Scott's forgetting where to line up, "When you've got a guy in a helmet ahead of you, sometimes the wires start firing a little bit differently."

The squad won't put on full pads until Saturday, but Scott has already showed something with his burst. Just when a hole is about to close, Scott shifts into another gear. Hagan, CU's lead recruiter in convincing Scott to choose the Buffs over Texas, can't help but smile each time he talks about his prized prospect — even while kidding about Scott trying to catch his breath in the rarefied air.

Colorado's two other touted freshman tailbacks, Ray Polk and Rodney Stewart, got a head start. They enrolled in summer classes at CU and participated in seven-on-seven drills with their future teammates. Scott had to complete work on a high school algebra class and arrived in Boulder for only 2 1/2 weeks. Already, he is the center of attention.

"When you put the ball in his hands and all that training and running goes out the window and you want a special athlete, that's Darrell," Hagan said.

Scott also worked about 15 minutes with the special teams — as a left-footed punter. Hawkins talked about Scott's punting ability during signing day in

February, but most within earshot probably discounted it as nothing more than an anecdote. After booming several 40-yarders Tuesday, Scott said everybody is serious about his punting gig.

Scott may not supplant incumbent Matt DiLallo (a 41.7 average as a two-year starter), but Hawkins has said it would be interesting to see how the opponents' defenses react to seeing a running threat line up as the punter.

"Coach (Hawkins) said he is going to put that in because they've never had a punter/running back there before," Scott said Tuesday.

According to coaches, all the newcomers passed the "eyeball test" for size and talent. Scott is filled out like a fullback, and Polk also has good size for a tailback, at 6-1 and 200 pounds.

"This is my third year doing this, and this was the first day I could stand behind the running backs and not see the sun," Hagan said.

Practice today.

Two two-hour sessions are scheduled, beginning at 9:45 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. The morning practice is mostly with the newcomers.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

Bufs tailbacks for 2008

Demetrius Sumler

5-feet-10, 220 pounds, So. Colorado's top returning rusher with 335 yards and four touchdowns in 2007. Most effective running between the tackles.

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Brian Lockridge

5-7, 180, So. Led Buffs running backs in per-carry yardage (5.6) as a true freshman. Has recovered from April's surgery for a sports hernia.

Kevin Moyd

5-7, 185, Jr. Had just four carries for 16 yards in 2007, missing five games to injuries, after playing only special teams in 2006.

Darrell Scott

6-2, 220, Fr. Parade All-American rated the nation's top prep tailback by most recruiting sites. Possesses the strength to run inside and the speed (10.5 for 100 meters) to turn the corner.

Ray Polk

6-1, 200, Fr. Played for former CSU quarterback Scooter Molander at Brophy Prep in Phoenix and ranked the nation's No. 11 running back by Rivals.com. Has 4.4 speed and says he welcomes the competition.

Rodney Stewart

5-6, 170, Fr. Rushed for 2,036 yards and 33 touchdowns as a senior at Brookhaven High School near Columbus, Ohio. He's expected to make an immediate impact as a kick returner.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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sports

Add green to CU's school colors

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Colorado football players might talk a good tale about leaving it all on the field, but their fans won't be leaving anything in the stands this season.

Folsom Field will be as green as the pristine new grass. Zero waste might be as lofty a goal as zero losses. Nevertheless, it is the goal.

Athletic director Mike Bohn declared war on garbage Tuesday the way former coach Bill McCartney once circled Nebraska in red. CU hauled an average of 10 tons of trash per game to landfills last season after more than doubling prior recycling efforts.

"We will be eliminating trash cans at our stadium," said Bohn, who rolled out the "Ralphie's Green Stampede" initiative at a news conference. Campus leaders are determined to make Folsom the first zero-waste football stadium. All debris is intended for recycle and compost bins.

Post Poll - CU Goes Green



The University of Colorado plans to recycle and compost all waste at Folsom Field, becoming the first zero-waste football stadium in the country. What do you think of the idea? ([Read related story](#))

Total Votes = 3633

Great idea	85.32 %
Good idea	5.229 %
Crazy idea	4.073 %
Bad idea	0.908 %
Don't care	4.459 %

"Our football coach talks about returning the national championship to Boulder," Bohn said on the first day of practice. "We want to be more than good. We want to be innovative."

The project was months in the making in tandem with the school's environmental center and student body leadership. The compost will come back to

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benefit campus landscaping.

"To help match the energy use in the stadium and for travel we are going to purchase carbon offset from the Colorado Carbon Fund, a program of the governor's energy office," Bohn said.

And in a move that may draw "only in Boulder" eye-rolling, Bohn announced valet parking for bicycles at the stadium.

Much of the zero-waste goal can be accomplished through concessions using containers that can be recycled.

Bohn wouldn't attach a price tag to the program, although CU acquired a corporate partnership with Broomfield-based White Wave Foods.

"The net cost to the institution should virtually be zero," Bohn said. The price of credits could be determined in part by how many times CU turns on the lights. One night game is scheduled for Sept. 18 against West Virginia, but times for the four home games that come later await TV plans.

Bohn said there are plans to add the Coors Events Center to the no-waste list.

Although stadium officials will remain vigilant for contraband (i.e. alcohol), CU spokesman Bronson Hilliard said, "We won't be patting down for Styrofoam."

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college football

CU's Scott the center of attention

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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CU fans are eager for Darrell Scott's arrival this season. (Kathryn Scott Osler / The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Blue-chip freshman tailback Darrell Scott received almost as many questions from the media regarding his punting as he did about running the football following a two-hour morning session of two-a-day practices Tuesday that opened Colorado's fall drills.

Scott, 2,433-yard rusher last fall at Ventura (Calif.) St. Bonaventure and ranked by most Internet recruiting sites last fall as the nation's top high

school running back, worked for about 15 minutes with the punting team and showed a strong leg. Most of his punts tumbled end-over-end but still went 40 yards with good hang time.

Scott punts left-footed, although he throws right-handed and prefers to catch a ball right-handed. Get this: He considers his right leg

Colorado Football

[Watch](#) video CU freshman running back Darrell Scott at his first practice Tuesday

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to be his dominant leg. He would kick off with his left leg but prefers to use push off from his right leg for a quick first step.

"It's weird," Scott said. "I just have to have my whole body. It's crazy."

Scott, who weighed in at 220 pounds this week, played soccer as a youth. He may not take the punting job away from incumbent Matt DiLallo (41.7 average as a two-year starter), but coaches are "going to put that in because they've never had a punter/runner back there before," Scott said. "So that's looking good."

DiLallo was to practice Tuesday afternoon. But Scott usually matched Aric Goodman punt for punt during the morning session. Goodman, a sophomore transfer from Wyoming, will compete against freshman Jameson Davis for the starting place-kicking job.

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As for his running, Scott said he felt the effects of playing at elevation. "If I could have gotten here earlier in the summer, I would have been all good with the altitude," he said. "I was just trying to stay fast paced. I was just out there having fun."

Said running backs coach Darian Hagan of Scott's first college practice: "He has a natural vision. He understands what's happening and how we're trying to block things."

Hagan also praised the talent of two other freshman running backs, Ray Polk of Scottsdale, Ariz., and Rodney Stewart of suburban Columbus, Ohio.

"All three of them are going to be very good," Hagan said.

Players won't get into full pads until Saturday.

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By B.G. Brooks

Tuesday, August 5, 2008

Blame his gene pool, but of all the things Darian Hagan accomplished as a quarterback at the University of Colorado, he never towered.

Sure, he squatted - which is what quarterbacks do under center, especially those 5-feet-10 or shorter. But as for sprinting, feinting and flawlessly directing the option, he most certainly did all the above.

So Hagan's anecdote on a pair of incoming running backs demands his stature be taken into account. Said Hagan on Tuesday of freshman tailbacks Darrell Scott (6-2, 220) and Ray Polk (6-1, 200):

"I told Mark Helfrich (offensive coordinator) that today was my first . . . that I could stand behind them and not see the sun. So, yeah, it was pretty impressive."

And coach Dan Hawkins added this about a third freshman running back, diminutive (5-6, 170) Rodney Stewart: "Yeah, and although Rodney doesn't block out the sun, he can blur out the sun."

Bottom line: CU's Class of 2008 has nice legs, the most heralded pair belonging to Scott, a *Parade* All-American who comes in as the Buffaloes' most celebrated tailback since homegrown Marcus Houston a decade ago.

The affable Scott, dubbed "Five-Star" by teammates, settled on campus about 2 1/2 weeks ago, his arrival delayed by summer-course work (algebra II) required to render him eligible. That completed, he began concentrating on conditioning, which he conceded was a minor concern during his first CU practice.

"If I had been here earlier, I would have been all good with the altitude," Scott said. "I'm still adjusting . . . I got a little winded."

But it was a temporary shortage Hagan and Hawkins could overlook, given the whirlwind that envelops players transitioning from high school to college.

Hagan, in his third year coaching CU's running backs, will take a steady, but not necessarily slow, approach in bringing along his young trio. Tuesday saw them introduced to two primary running plays, with Hagan advising, "They're the most important plays they're going to run and they're going to have to be patient learning (them).

"Once we got to the individual periods and they understood what we're trying to accomplish, they

started picking it up."

Once immersed in the individual periods, Scott's conditioning was overshadowed by something else - an innate talent that had veteran players curious to watch during some seven-on-seven work before camp.

"You put the ball in his hands . . . all that training and stuff goes out the window and he's a special athlete," Hagan said. "He gets the ball in his hands, he turns it on."

Scott, who ran for 2,433 yards and 33 touchdowns as a high school senior, said he had no problem hitting holes Tuesday, "but coach wanted me to go vertical more than outside . . . I've never had a running backs coach, so (Hagan) is just coaching me up."

Scott also tried his left foot at punting - "Weird," he said, because he throws right, catches primarily with his right hand and considers his right leg dominant - in a camp experiment Hawkins hinted at a couple of weeks ago.

Hawkins was more focused on punt protection than who was punting, but Hagan said Scott "was booming it. I would say he looked like Ray Guy, but (he's) white. So I would say Reggie Roby."

Whatever Scott's or Polk's or Stewart's roles eventually become won't be decided for several weeks or longer. Hawkins tells all freshmen "to come in with the plan they're going to play . . . work hard, think like they're going to play and act like they're going to play - and then we'll sort it out. You never know who's ready emotionally, mentally and physically."

Of course, Scott, who is rooming in camp with defensive back Steven Hicks but will be paired with Polk once school starts, hopes to play ASAP. Asked if he felt as if all eyes were on him, Scott laughed and said, "It's whatever. I'm out here to have fun . . . and to win the Big 12. Honestly. I think we'll be very good this year."

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TIMES-CALL

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Scott lands at CU

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — The fuss surrounding Darrell Scott's arrival at Colorado seems to grow louder by the hour. On Tuesday, no one banged the drum louder than Darian Hagan.

CU's running backs coach beams these days for other reasons besides just Scott, though. And after seeing the prized recruit take part in his first practice as a Buff on Tuesday morning, Hagan also heaped praise upon the other two new backs, Ray Polk and Rodney Stewart, who'd be receiving more than their share of hype were it not for the presence of the third.

The Buffs and Hagan have good running backs returning like Demetrius Sumler and Brian Lockridge. If Hagan's descriptions prove even a little prophetic, they'll be hard-pressed to hold off the freshmen.

"Rodney has unbelievable quicks," Hagan said. "That dude is going to be really good. Darrell and Ray are two big old dudes who look the part. I was telling (offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich) that today was my first day — and this is my third year doing this with the running backs — that I can stand behind the running backs and not see the sun. So it was pretty impressive."

Stewart, listed at 5-foot-6, 170 pounds, conjures images of Hugh Charles. Polk, 6-1, 200 pounds, and Scott, 6-2, 220 pounds, are cut more from the mold of former-Buff Chris Brown.

Size, though, wasn't all that prompted Hagan.

"It's fun when you can come out and see the difference in the talent level that we've had at that position," he said.

CU's first fully-padded practice isn't until Saturday, and Tuesday's split workouts saw mostly newcomers going in the morning. So forming a true idea of their talent was not realistic, even with Scott taking his turns "booming" punts a la former NFL all-pro punter Reggie Roby, Hagan said.

The day's biggest story was Scott's presence, stalled until 21/2 weeks ago while he took a month-long Algebra 2 course back home in California. Admitting he's never had a running back coach before, Scott said he was, indeed, coached Tuesday. His first task is to learn to read defenses, and he added Hagan told him to run more down the field, and not so much outside. He also said his roommate come fall semester will be Polk, as assigned by Hagan.

Asked if his first college practice was eye-opening, Scott, the Big 12's preseason newcomer of the year, shrugged.

"It wasn't that big of a shocker; it was just trying to get used to the altitude, trying to stay fast paced on every route," he said.

Asked about all eyes being on him, something he better get used to, Scott droned, "It's whatever."

Comments like this one from Hagan won't deflect that attention soon.



University of Colorado running back Darrell Scott participates in drills on the first day of the Buffaloes' practice on Tuesday in Boulder. **Kira Horvath/Times-Call**

“Rodney and Ray have been here longer and they’re a little bit farther ahead with their conditioning and the altitude,” he said. “And Darrell, he’s a dude that you want him to train and you want him to run in this hot sun, and he’s going to do well. But you put the ball in his hands and all of that training and all of that stuff goes out the window, and he becomes a special athlete. And that’s him.”

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Freshmen in mix for left guard job

By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Erick Faatagi's departure from the Colorado football program and its offensive line leaves a hole that must be filled.

Or not.

"The job was going to be wide open either way," CU offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said Tuesday about the left guard position. "He was just going to be another guy who was in the mix. He had, by no means, proven he was a guy that deserved to be a starter. He had the physical tools, but he certainly hadn't proven anything."

What's alarming about Faatagi's absence is it leaves CU with just one guard — junior Devin Head — who has played. Faatagi, a fifth-year senior ruled academically ineligible for the third year in a row and, therefore, removed from the team, hadn't either for CU. But he figured to be in the mix for that starting spot. Instead, it'll probably go to a freshman.

After starting two true freshmen on the offensive line last year in guard Kai Maiava (who transferred last spring) and tackle Ryan Miller, it's clear coaches aren't afraid to use youth up front. Grimes and head coach Dan Hawkins called left guard "wide open" as camp began Tuesday.

"I started off my meeting (Monday) night reminding them that the best guys are going to play," Grimes said. "Whether that ends up being a true freshman or a guy that has more experience, only time will tell."

"But the good news is at least we have some guys that are competing for the jobs."

CU's pre-season depth chart lists only redshirt freshmen, other than Head, at both guard spots. They include Matt Bahr, Shawn Daniels, Blake Behrens and Mike Iltis.

Among the incoming freshmen, Max Tuioti-Mariner was touted as one of the nation's best offensive linemen last year despite not playing as a senior in Corona, Calif., due to a torn ACL and MCL. He'll have a shot at the job, too.

Grimes said Tuioti-Mariner had less rust on him than you'd expect.

"The thing that impressed me most about him this morning was how coachable he was," Grimes said. "He really did a good job of paying attention to what I'm telling him. When I'd tell him something once, the next time he'd do it the way I wanted it done. He's a guy that's very eager to learn and wants to be coached and wants to do it the right way."

Said Tuioti-Mariner: "It feels good to be back, especially with this team, too. ... I feel good. I feel normal."

QUOTEWORTHY: "Cramming two semesters of algebra in less than a month is hard. I was living and breathing algebra." — Running back Darrell Scott on the algebra 2 course he completed this summer back in California.



University of Colorado lineman Maxwell Tuioti-Mariner runs drills on the first day of the Buffaloes' practice Tuesday in Boulder. **Kira Horvath/Times-Call**

EXTRA POINTS: Freshman linebacker Lynn Katoa is not being allowed to practice until he, “gets all his stuff finished for school,” Hawkins said. Katoa will redshirt in 2008. ... Grimes said he hoped to know by the end of the week on which sides tackles Nate Solder and Miller will play. At the end of spring, Miller was on the right and Solder the left. They played both Tuesday. ... Injured safety Bret Smith drew sand-hauling duty, which was an unpopular but ever-present conditioning tool strength coach Jeff Pitman implemented last year. Smith is out for the year with an ACL injury. ... Faatagi’s dismissal opened things up for walk-on long snapper Austin Bisnow to take the final spot on the roster of 105.

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